

FORMING THE SPIRITUALITY OF EMERGING ADULTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife Amy,

whose heart beats to
connect the disconnected,
be an advocate for the marginalized,
and a conduit of healing for the hurting

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis-project is to develop a curriculum of spiritual formation in order to promote a holistic spirituality that will thrive within the current cultural climate for emerging adults. The author surveyed various socio-cultural influences, such as consumerism and individualism, affecting emerging adults and their spirituality today. The Holy Trinity is presented as a model to help these individuals reposition their lives in a way that honors God. This repositioning centered on four specific areas: affective, epistemological, theological, and relational. Several methods and practices are outlined to help foster this lifestyle repositioning to occur. A curriculum has been developed to be taught to emerging adults in churches or on college campuses.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Culture is always directive, reflective and never neutral.¹ Pondering such a fact can cause concern for those living in the cultural landscape present today. What is the level of consciousness individuals possess of the influence of culture upon their soul? Help is required to aid individuals navigate the situation in which they find themselves. The aim of this thesis-project is to develop a curriculum of spiritual formation in order to promote a holistic spirituality that will thrive within the current cultural climate for emerging adults.

Several traits plague emerging adults in their quest for fulfillment and living a meaningful life. These acquired tendencies manipulate and control the spirituality they display. Several illustrations provide a glimpse into the items and issues tugging on the emerging adult soul. The following quotes paint the present behavior of this group and reveal the need that drives the search for the stated goal.

First, most emerging adults possess a skewed and distorted view of God. Without an accurate understanding of who He is and who they are, there lies no potential for true transformation. Part of this problem is due to sinful human nature where the tendency is to pursue a selfish trajectory in life. The other part is

¹ Andy Crouch, "Culture Makers" (lecture, DMin. Residency, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, January 18, 2005).

the culture factor affecting one's soul. Technology and media have exponentially increased the effect and potency of the cultural bath in which emerging adults swim.

Second, there exists a fluid nature in the identity of the emerging adult. The individual possesses a floating sense of self willing to shift and implant wherever desire aligns itself. This practice creates a climate where the substance of the self becomes disposable and for sale. The deep and significant things of life become commoditized and placed on the market to be negotiated for something better or more appetizing.

The lack of substance or a solidified internal self allows the multitude of influences in one's daily life to dictate what one is impressed with. Andree Seu, a columnist for *World Magazine*, shares, "When you don't have an internal sense of self, you need an external—and constant supply of it. You're condemned to roam the earth a parasite."² This reality dictates the insatiable thirst of the process. One's hunger and appetite grows as they experience the insatiable nature of the items they pursue. An internal void continually echoes while the longing for satisfaction increases.

What are the ramifications of a person living in this way? The socially constructed self places himself at the mercy of his surroundings left to be tossed around by distorted desires. The concept of the, "Self being conditioned by the

² Andree Seu, "Be Somebody: Finding Affirmation in Christ or Spend a Lifetime in Terror of Standing Outside the 'Local Ring,'" *World Magazine*, 27 May 2006, 39.

world,” places us in the role of victim or exploiter.³ Finding oneself in one of these roles and one begins to fight for power. This power struggle is one of the key things that destroys virtuous knowing. If selfish gain of power and control are the goals of education, true knowing of “other” cannot result. Such a dynamic will always build walls, not bridges. The result is faith and spirituality (have) become centered around self and personal realization and happiness instead of Christ, God, and truth.⁴

This tendency present in most emerging adults is combustible and accelerated through the current culture of consumerism. This often enters lives in a subtle manner and thus remains encrypted to affect the state of the soul beneath the surface of consciousness. Rodney Clapp depicts this strategy by noting; Consumerism is ... an ethos, a character-cultivating way of life that seduces and insinuates and acclimates. This... is consumption that militates against all kinds of Christian virtues, such as patience and contentedness and self denial, but almost always with a velvet glove rather than an iron fist. It speaks in tones sweet and sexy rather than dictatorial, and it conquers by promises rather than by threats.⁵

³ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), 13.

⁴ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York: Oxford, 2005), 175.

⁵ Rodney Clapp, ed., *The Consuming Passion: Christianity and the Consumer Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 171.

The desires held by emerging adults for fulfillment and satisfaction are not wrong or evil in themselves. The problem arises when the cultural ingredients present today are mixed with human longing, hunger, and desire. This combination produces a climate ripe for hearts and minds to be manipulated by any agenda holding significant power and control. These ingredients making up the cultural landscape and influencing souls are positioning themselves in very strategic ways. The content these influencers possess and the manner in which they enter are just as concerning.

We all receive countless messages every day – especially from the media influencers and celebrity endorsers – urging us to reach for our dreams, fulfill our emotional needs, go for the gusto, self-actualize, take care of ourselves, and feel good about who we are. . . . These messages are often intertwined with, or linked to, New Luxury goods. Oprah Winfrey endorses products, Martha Stewart sells them, Sarah Jessica Parker and her friends on *Sex and the City* display them.⁶

Style and content are incredibly important in any discipline in life. The relationship between these two entities determines much of the success they receive. From the examples listed above, it is obvious the precision and expertise marketers and media structures are displaying today as they participate in this opportunity. Emerging Adults would do well to acquire the same level of skill as they integrate their beliefs and behavior.

⁶ Michael J. Silverstein and Neil Fiske, *Trading Up: The New American Luxury* (New York: Portfolio, 2003), 12.

The combination of individualism coupled with society's consumeristic tendencies is a powerful force affecting the lives of emerging adults. It becomes incredibly difficult to develop a Christ honoring spirituality amidst the affective storm created by these attributes. Peter Whybrow notes, "By instinct we are geared for individual survival—curious, reward-driven, and self-absorbed—and technology is now in cahoots with that craving, having removed the natural constraints on human behavior of distance, sea, and mountain."⁷

The spirituality of most emerging adults is driven by a theology and ethic that is amoeba-like in nature. David Wells asserts, "The Christian Faith has become privatized and at a single stroke confession is eviscerated and reflection reduced mainly to thought about one's self."⁸ He continues, "Once (confession) has lost its discipline in the Word of God, it finds its subject matter anywhere along a line that runs from Eastern Spirituality to radical politics to feminist ideology to environmental concerns." The desire of the day or moment is left to fill the void God intended for truth and the gospel.

Another acquired attribute of emerging adults is their belief that they can attain any goal. They have been pumped full of self assurance and narcissism from family members, friends, teachers, and society as a whole. This has created a mindset and posture that does not serve them very well as they encounter the

⁷ Peter C. Whybrow, *American Mania: When more Is Not Enough* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), xix.

⁸ David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 101.

harsh realities of life, relationships, and ministry. Jean Twenge, in her book *Generation Me*, pronounces that this elevation of self creates an eroding stage upon which to perform.

These are a snapshot of the circumstances facing emerging adults today. It is through identifying these traits and constructing ways to deal with them that emerging adults will be better equipped to discern and make solid choices in their life with Christ. Based on these images, the most pressing concern for emerging adults is their need to acquire a perspective and eventually a lifestyle that addresses their distorted ways of being and living and move them toward a spirituality that allows them to thrive and bloom into Christ-likeness for the sake of God in their current situation. There exists need for reform, redemption, transformation, and realignment in the areas of personhood and identity, emotions and affective nature, relationships, habits and behaviors, and epistemology. The following outline of chapters is an attempt to respond to the situation emerging adults find themselves in and to help them pursue a life of discipleship aggressively.

To begin the investigation into the heart, mind and soul of today's emerging adults one must uncover the way they interpret and experience their world; from choosing who to date to which church if any to participate in to which shoes to buy. The research questions driving chapter three concern:

- What are the socio-cultural forces influencing emerging adults today?
- How are those forces influencing emerging adults today?
- What are others doing to form individuals spiritually?

One way of revealing the soul of the emerging adult is the manner in which they respond to crisis and circumstances. It is here that the outside world gets to peer inside the soul of the person to discover the shaping effect of their life to this point. The objective of this section of the study is to understand the ingredients that produce the spirituality which has been adopted and developed by the emerging adult. A guiding question for this is “what relationships and/or experiences have created the current state of this individual’s soul?” Chapter three covers the literature review needed in preparation for this study. It is broken into two sections. First, time is spent assessing some of the socio-cultural influences emerging adults encounter. Where do these influencers enter our lives? How do they acquire the power to influence as they do? The two of most potent influencers of this population are consumerism and individualism. Second, a literature review is conducted in the area of spiritual formation. Some of the questions driving this section are: What is it? How is done? What tools are used in the process? Who are some of evangelicals leading voices in this area? Numerous lifestyle habits are presented as well in this section from which emerging adults are able to grow their spirituality.

Some of the foundational questions driving this thesis-project are:

- What can be done to prevent those influences which are detrimental to the individuals spirituality to affect them?
- Where does a person gain an accurate assessment of who they really are?
- How does an individual determine what is true personhood?

- ° How does a person discover who they are and how they are to exist in community?
- ° How does a person discover the extent of them living out of a false reality (and false self) and begin being moved to a place of what is really real? (true personhood)

These questions tie to together chapter two (theological framework) and chapter three (literature review on the spiritual formation and socio-cultural influences of emerging adults.) To begin answering these questions, chapter two constructs a theological framework to aid these individuals in this task. The Holy Trinity acts as a template for people to discover who they are as persons created in God's image and how they are to relate in community. It provides a structure after which emerging adults should model their lives for a more God honoring spirituality. Investigation will probe into the relationships existing within the Godhead as a template of insight to what should be the ideal for identity, relationships, and spiritual posture. Out of this ideal the intention will be to extrapolate this model into our human existence. Several concepts are presented in later chapters to support this truth and help individuals live it out from a variety of vantage points. The idea of transformation is discussed and investigated from a biblical perspective to help emerging adults see they are not alone in this process and that it is being and has been done.

As the project moves out of chapters two and three the focus shifts to the "so what" and application phase (chapters four and five) of the study. The questions arising here are: What structures, tools, relationships can help emerging

adults foster a more true form of personhood and spirituality? How are emerging adults able to respond and adopt a way of life to promote this new reality? Is there a structure that can help promote an individual acquiring a more sturdy and holistic spirituality? What tools are available for this journey and how do they work? Chapter four lays out the context and begins to formulate the findings from the previous chapters. It outlines the structure chosen to help emerging adults deal with their situation and thrive as a disciple for Christ in their present world. An attempt is made to provide this group with a new perspective of God and themselves and give them tools to create and construct a more viable, sturdy, and functional spirituality. The aim is not to construct a static formula or program in which to plug into, but to create a scaffolding structure for emerging adults to build a spirituality that is biblically faithful, considerate of personhood, and culturally durable.

Chapter five includes curricular content, syllabi, lesson plans, and an assessment strategy for the curriculum. It also conducts a survey of the emerging adult soul. This material provides the context from which the curriculum must begin. From there curriculum attempts to draw the emerging adult toward a new way of seeing, being and doing. Effort has been given to present the information throughout the thesis-project in a way that is palatable and engaging for emerging adults. Revision and modifications are sure to be made as assessment of the curriculum is carried out.

Chapter six is an attempt to draw conclusions from the project. It summarizes and analyzes the project's findings, discusses implications, and considers areas for further study.

This study concerns itself with specifics involved in a certain age group. For the purposes of this document, the population in focus is termed emerging adults as penned by Jeffery Arnett.⁹ This population possesses specific issues that come with being an 18 to 35 year old at the beginning of the twenty first century. And those issues directly affect the way these individuals live out their spirituality. Again, the goal is to help them gain understanding of that which they have become and that it does not serve them well living as a Christ follower. A hunger must be created for a new way of doing life. This will drive the discovery of what they need and what can help them move in that direction.

The product and end result of this study is a curriculum to implement in the lives of emerging adults. Specifically, the researcher aims to implement the curriculum at a Christian college as part of the undergraduate program. Many of the philosophies, tools, and methodologies implemented by the churches and institutions today are or are becoming obsolete. Arthur Levine and Jeanette Cureton affirm this notion.

Whenever societies change quickly, there is a tendency for the curriculum to lose (its) anchor points. In a short period of time, a course of study becomes

⁹ Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

anachronistic. It no longer prepares students for the world in which they will live, and it imparts an intellectual tradition that has become outdated.¹⁰

There is great disconnect in the leaders being produced in these centers of higher education to the potent efficacy of the church in the current cultural climate. Much of the methodology and content used is missing the pressing concerns of humanity today. There is a need to pursue a reformation in the process of spiritual formation of emerging adults. Todd Hall, researcher and professor at Biola University, explains that part of this disconnect stems from the separation between a higher and lower ways of knowing.¹¹ The higher way of knowing can be described as head knowledge—linear, logical, language-based, explicit, and left brain heavy. The lower way of knowing can be categorized as gut level knowledge—non-linear, holistic, non-verbal, implicit, memory driven, and emotional. He states that true spiritual formation integrates these two ways of knowing to foster a congruency between belief and behavior.

The goal is not to bash what is currently being done in churches or institutions of higher education but to encourage and promote healthy change for the purpose of better serving our Creator and His creation. It is necessary to

¹⁰ Arthur Levine and Jeanette S. Cureton, *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 165.

¹¹ Todd Hall, "Relational Spirituality" (lecture, CCCU Campus Minister's Conference, San Diego, CA, February 22, 2007).

uncover the weaknesses as well as strengths of these institutions for the purpose of designing ways to aid them in carrying out their missions and callings.¹²

The overarching aim is to excavate the person and soul of the emerging adult for the purpose of facilitating greater depth in their relationship to Christ and the outflow of that life for the sake of the world. Digging into the soul of the emerging adult provides two benefits; one, it creates a higher self-awareness enabling them to become more intentional in waging war upon the negative influencers of faith development and adopting those habits which nurture a mature faith; and two, it allows those working and ministering to emerging adults to gage a better understanding of the life of these individuals (and their community) to determine where their time and efforts should best be positioned.

The principle driving this pursuit of a more holistic spirituality for emerging adults is what Kohlberg labeled “cognitive dissonance.”¹³ This is the tension created when an individual realizes their present lifestyle and beliefs are unable to withstand the complexity and situations encountered in the world. It is important that they are confronted with situations that challenge their values and beliefs to discover whether they are able to weather the pressures time will present. Time will be spent uncovering currently held beliefs and values and where those beliefs and values need to be reconsidered and reset.

¹² The specific institution and context the researcher is attempting to address is Moody Bible Institute located in downtown Chicago, Illinois. D.L. Moody founded the school in 1887 to prepare people for vocational ministry. The personal goal of the researcher is to develop a curriculum of spiritual formation to promote a holistic spirituality that will thrive within the current cultural climate for students at Moody Bible Institute.

¹³ Arthur F. Holmes, *Shaping Character: Moral Education in the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 20.

It is an imperative to engage in this pursuit for the sake of intellectual, cultural, and spiritual honesty. To possess a faith which is respected by an on-looking world, the tough questions must be asked and the motivations one possesses must be uncovered.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

*O eternal Trinity! O Godhead! You are a deep sea, into which the deeper I enter
the more I find, and the more I find the more I seek.*

Catherine of Siena

As emerging adults find themselves in the current culture, the need for spiritual leaders to confront the societal influences shaping their lives becomes apparent. A framework must be created and developed to address and promote these young peoples' spiritual formation. The model currently in place has resulted in spiritual vagabonds who can be described as self-driven, individualistic, chameleon-like, commitment-phobic, image-crazed, and institutionally ignorant. These directionless adults determine the landscape of society when no transcendent guide comes to displace these attributes in them with something stronger.

The Holy Trinity provides a structure after which emerging adults should model their lives for a better result. Discovery of true personhood from the example of the Trinity will be the aim of this section. Investigation will probe into the relationships existing within the Godhead as a template of insight to what should be the ideal for identity, relationships, and spiritual posture. Out of this ideal the intention will be to extrapolate this model into our human existence.

Discussion will follow uncovering the identity and interpersonal dynamics for Christians in light of the Triune Godhead.

Human Interaction with the Trinity

C.S. Lewis describes the believers' interaction with the Trinity when he states, "The whole dance or drama or pattern of God's three-personal life is to be played out in each one of us . . . each one of us has got to enter that pattern. We must take our place in the dance."¹⁴ Stanley Grenz illustrates the fragmented and fluid nature of the identity and desire of individuals in society today. He proposes:

The just modern condition entails the loss of the disengaged isolated observer who as a self-existent autonomous individual forms that primary building block for the purely contractual social order. Rather the postmodern self is constituted by social relationships. The socially formed self, however, is highly decentred and fluid, for a person can have as many selves as social groups in which he or she participates. Consequently, the self is a bundle of fluctuating relationships and momentary preferences. In a fast-changing world however, this leads to a highly unstable, impermanent self.¹⁵

This description paints a shaky foundation upon which to walk. Grenz reveals the need for emerging adults to acquire something greater to foster their journey into true personhood. Any person searching for true personhood must logically begin the search with humankind's creator and sustainer, for beginning elsewhere assumes true understanding resides in the self.

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 152-153.

¹⁵ Stan Grenz, *The Social God and The Relational Self* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 130.

Relationships within the Trinity

As one peers into the identity and relationships present in the Trinity, one becomes profoundly aware of the significance it poses for all of humanity. The place of origin must be the individual identity of each member of the Godhead. The Son has a clear understanding of who He is: He is distinct from the Father and the Spirit and possesses specific qualities that exist only in Him. The Son lives out of the fullness of His identity; however, the son's purpose, role, and mission are directly connected to the other two persons of the Trinity. The interactions of the Father, Son, and Spirit in scripture exemplify the distinct nature of each. Still, John 17 shows that there is a oneness and unity present which binds them together. Dennis Kinlaw supports this reality by sharing, "Through the Son the redemptive will of the Father concerning his creation is accomplished, and that good work is done by the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Persons are uniquely distinct, but they are never independent."¹⁶

The church fathers created the term "perichoresis" to describe this reality present in the Trinity. The term shows that one person can be open to another. Thomas Torrance more technically explains the term as "one nature existing co-inherently within the other without the integrity of either nature suffering loss."¹⁷ This dynamic in the Godhead allows each person the ability to bloom into the

¹⁶ Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Let's Start with Jesus: A New Way of Doing Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 82.

¹⁷ Ibid.

fullness of who He is as an individual. With that is the notion that the individual fullness of each person in the Godhead would not exist if it were not for the interaction with the other two. Each member individually becomes fully actualized as they relate with each other. Without the giving and receiving of each part of the Godhead, much of what has been experienced and observed in history would not have taken place (John 14:11-14). Kinlaw declares that, "The inner life of the triune Godhead is thus a life of communion in which the three divine persons live from, for, and in one another."¹⁸

The innate attribute of the Trinity of giving and receiving of themselves may be one of the most significant realities for the church. God has strategically used the Trinitarian relationships to convey His purpose and model for humanity. The implications of this reality deeply affect our position in the family of God and our mission, purpose, and role in the world. Even though the Trinity acts as a model through which we can live in a community, it is not a formula. The relationship between the members of the Trinity has been said to exist as a dance.¹⁹ This aids humanity because it attempts to acquire similar interaction with God and others. Developing this self-giving relationship requires humans to work on many aspects of their lives, some of which are intentionality, disciplined effort, artistry, and creativity. It is through these types of characteristics that some

¹⁸ Ibid., 83.

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 152-153.

of the most powerful connections and intimacy may be developed within relationships.

Grace as a Key for Transformation

As Christians attempt to live in the light of the Trinity, they must incorporate two ingredients for success. The first is the gift of grace. Without grace, our pursuit of Christ-likeness is futile. On the journey of sanctification, failure will come and believers will become discouraged as they discover their true selves. Therefore, the need for a grace-infusing atmosphere becomes apparent.

Grace is the attribute of God which allows man the ability to enter the arena of transformation. Without it, the opportunity to grow in Christ-likeness ceases. It acts as the oxygen a person breathes as he or she treads the path of discipleship. God's heart for humanity can be seen through grace. It infuses hope and security in the believer that when failure comes God will not leave. Grace is not an abstraction, not a palace that God constructs for his exclusive use, limiting us to the adjoining dog kennel. No, the palace is for us, but the palace is also cruciform, in the shape of a cross. With all other pilgrims encircled by mercy, drawn by grace and compelled by love²⁰

²⁰ Rodderick T. Leupp, *Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry of Grace, Faith & Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 109.

The Role of the Cross as We Encounter the Trinity

The second ingredient surfacing is the reality the cross. The Trinity displays the character of the cross as we observe their relationships with each other as well as their collective relationship with man. The persons of the Godhead exemplify sacrifice, true submission, and selfless love.

More than any other religious symbol, the cross invites (and really requires) participation with one's whole being, for in it God's entire being is exposed to the world. Study and cogitation can bring one into the cross's neighborhood, yet by themselves show only the polished surfaces and not the rough, pulsating center. In the cross is overflowing, drenching grace, and grace is how God seeks to engage our attention . . . God has not left humankind to its own devices, but has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).²¹

If a believer submits his or her life to the cross of Christ then a result should be a sensitivity and awareness to the things of God. The nature of the cross and crucified life shifts the focus from the self and places it upon the well-being of "the other." One example from Jesus' life was his encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:4). As Jesus meets with the woman he breaks down cultural barriers for the sake of transforming a life. He displays the intentionality, concern, and selflessness characterizing the cruciform life.

²¹ Ibid., 104-105.

Jesus as Ideal Personhood Exemplified

It is in the search for true personhood that one finds even greater appreciation and gratitude for Jesus Christ. The believer finds comfort and solace in Christ coming in the form of man. Hope is bestowed as well because of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. He demonstrates and displays ultimate victory over all that man encounters.

Through Jesus, God communicates that He desires a personal relationship with His creation. There are several qualities of personhood drawn from Jesus' life. Jesus affirms that God views the physical body, the emotions, the will, the mind, and humanity's social nature as good (John, Phil.2:7-8). Because Jesus exists as a member of the Holy Trinity as well as a full human being, he is the standard for true personhood. Jesus is the clearest picture believers possess to understanding the nature and requirements involved with personhood. He reveals the connection of the God who is holy to fallen humanity and His purpose and desire for them.

First, Jesus possessed a clear understanding of who he was. He knew he was the Son of God and existed in an eternal relationship with Father and the Holy Spirit. One of the key attributes of God is self-donation, which is not possible if one does not possess him or her self first.

Second, Jesus found his identity in relation to those with whom he lived. The role of the Son of God exists because of this relationship to the Father; his roles of teacher, Savior, and Messiah exist in relation to the disciples and eventually the rest of humanity. His role as son exists in relation to Mary and Joseph. Dennis Kinlaw affirms this view when he asserts, "The concept of the

person as the autonomous individual whose identity is found in the self is an Enlightenment notion that finds no support in reality or in biblical thought."²²

Third, those relationships which define Jesus' identity are reciprocal in nature. Each person in each relationship provides the substance by which he or she is known. Mary is known as a mother because of her relationship to Jesus. The disciples are known as followers in relationship to Jesus.

Fourth, Jesus shows that true personhood integrates identity with behavior and action (1 John 4:8, 16). He could not act in a manner contrary to his identity, which determined each ethical decision and action he carried out. He performed His miracles, had compassion on humankind, died on the cross, and questioned those abusing their power because of his identity and person. Jesus lived his life out of a solidified identity submitted to the Father. His lifestyle and actions were always true to his nature. This confronts the state of humanity today. There seldom exists fidelity between man's true personhood and his behavior. If Christians commit themselves to this specific example of Jesus, increased credibility and trust will be conveyed to the on looking world.

The Postmodern Self Contrasted With the Biblical Self

Evangelicals affirm the postmodern view of the self by believing the social construction of selfhood originates outside itself. However, this alone does not necessitate a biblical description of the self. The postmodern tendency is to create a schizophrenic self that shifts and distorts. Personhood, according to the

²² Kinlaw, 81.

biblical model, is based upon a relationship that is constant, faithful, and reliable, as well as specific to a covenant relationship with God.²³

The first insight from scripture that points to true personhood is in Genesis 1:26-27. Here the Trinity decides to "make man in (their) image." If humans are made in the image of the Trinity, there is bestowed a oneness and corporate nature to them. There exists a true individual self for each person, and that individual is created to live in, for, and by his or her community (John 14:19, 10:25-30). A dynamic of self realization and self donation exists in true personhood. Christ's life exemplifies true self-understanding and the pouring out of that self to those around Him (Mark 8:34-35, John 15:13).

True personhood also displays submission, commitment, and sacrifice. These themes show up in Jesus' life and ministry in vast measures. In Corinthians 15:28, Jesus freely chooses to submit himself to the Father. Hebrews 5:8 reveals that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. The crises of life prove to be allowed by God for the sake of man's maturity and spiritual growth.

Furthermore, true personhood appears to be characterized by people living in fellowship with others and with God (John 15:5). The imperative stated by Jesus here reveals God's desire for people not to live in isolation. The metaphor of the branch abiding in the vine for the sake of bearing fruit speaks to the necessity of Christians communing with God and others. This passage (John 15:1-8) illustrates the concept of perichoresis between the Father and the Son, which

²³ Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

provides a template for believers in their relationship with God and those around them. There appears to be a correlation between the level of abiding and the amount and quality of fruit produced. Roderick Leupp elaborates on this idea by stating, “Any human is truly human only in as much as he or she draws life from the Trinity As God's spirit infuses divine life into human life, the proper equation is: as one becomes more conformed to God's likeness, one becomes more human.”²⁴

Finally, true personhood is discovered when those persons in relationship with each other give of themselves and receive in return. God uses the transactions of giving and receiving to mold His people into His likeness (Phil. 4:14 -20). Bishop Desmond Tutu explains this characteristic of personhood further:

We say that a person is a person through other persons. We are made for togetherness, to live in a delicate network of interdependence. The totally self-sufficient person is sub-human, for none of us comes fully formed into the world. I need other human beings in order to be human myself; I would not know how to walk, talk, think, behave as a human person except by learning it all from other human beings.²⁵

Each moment of a person's existence, he or she is presented with choices that will promote movement toward or away from true personhood²⁶ (Psalm 115). Experience and sacrificial relationships foster true personhood. Conversely, the

²⁴ Leupp, 98.

²⁵ Desmond Tutu, “Restoring Justice,” *The Tablet*, February 21, 2004.

²⁶ Gary Parrett, “Postmodern Personhood” (Lecture, DMin. Residency, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, January 18, 2005).

experiences that promote selfishness, isolation, and independence from God and others tend to prevent one from coming to personhood.

Jeremiah 2:1-13 describes the picture of a human heart gone astray. Contextually, the nation of Israel has forgotten its identity and allegiance. The transaction observed here sees Israel exchanging her glory "for that which does not profit" (v.11). In verse 13, the Lord points out that His people have done two things. First, Israel has cut herself off from God. Second, she has fashioned for herself a life that is self-driven and self-seeking. The situation uncovered here in Jeremiah echoes much of what is taking place currently. The plea from God is to acknowledge and confess the broken cisterns being used and that which is filling them. Israel is being called to submit her whole being to the cistern God provides and commit herself to allowing Him to fill her with living water.

Romans 1:18-32 portrays a similar transaction. In this passage, Paul admonishes the saints in Rome to honor and give thanks to God in order to protect their thinking from becoming futile and their hearts from becoming foolish and dark (v.21). His warning continues to convey the result they will incur if they do not respond appropriately. The end result finds God giving them over to their lusts and desires for the purpose of dishonoring themselves, which leads to movement away from true personhood.

If one heeds the warning God gives, as did the woman at the well in John 4:7-42, the outcome can be extremely different. Jesus shares that her thirst will be eternally satisfied. Transformation and movement toward true personhood

occurred not only in the woman's life but also in the lives of those with whom she shared her testimony (v.39).

Another dynamic present in the journey toward personhood is found in Colossians 3:1-17 and details the process of surrendering the old self for the new self. The image Paul provides sees garments being taken off (those things that impede intimacy with Christ 3:5) and new ones being put on (3:12-17).²⁷

The new self, or "Christ self", is based on our identification with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (Col.3:1-4). Paul further explains the Christian's identification with Christ in Romans 6:2-11. Paul points out the necessity for the believer to position himself with Christ in His atoning work. It is only through the death and crucifixion of the old self that anyone can experience the blessing and freedom of life in the realm of newness. Subsequently, it is through the believer associating himself with Christ's resurrection and ascension that he is able to experience the reality of the new self.

The pivotal point for humanity is Christ's death on the cross. Similarly, the sacrifice of the cross and the cruciform life sit at the center of true transformation in any person's life (Matt. 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23-25). This truth is also affirmed when the inner life of the Trinity is observed. The persons of the Godhead display a continuous posture of sacrifice and self donation (John 15:9, 15:12-13).

²⁷ Gary Parrett, "Postmodern Personhood" (Lecture, DMin. Residency, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, January 18, 2005).

If a believer submits his life to the cross of Christ, then a result should be a sensitivity and awareness to the things of God. The nature of the cross and crucified life shift focus off the self and place it upon the well being of "the other." One example from Jesus' life was his encounter with the Samaritan (John 4:4).

Even though the Trinity acts as and provides a model for us to live and do community through, it is not formulaic or mechanical. The relationship between the members of the Trinity has been said to exist as a dance.²⁸ This aids humanity as it attempts to acquire similar interaction with God and others. There is much required to develop this self giving relationship. Some of which are: intentionality, disciplined effort, artistry and creativity. It is through these types of characteristics that some of the most powerful connections and intimacy developed in relationships.

The study of transformation as accounted for in scripture is a necessary place for emerging adults to gain insight in helping them acquire a holistic spirituality. First, transformation occurs in individuals through their choices (Gen.3:18). Adam and Eve chose to disobey resulting in separation between them and God. Throughout the Old Testament transformation is seen happening gradually and in some circumstances immediately. In the lives of Moses, Saul, David, and Job transformation occurs gradually. However, there are some very dramatic scenes in the Old Testament where transformation occurs. Enoch

²⁸ Lewis, 152-153.

(Gen.5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1–12) were taken by God instantaneously.

Several instances occurred where God's judgment brought forth leprosy

(Num.12:9-16; 2 Chron. 26:16-21). In the Psalms, transformation takes place in

various ways. In Psalms of lament transformation usually comes suddenly as the

author shows confidence in God and responds by worshipping Him. In Psalms of

God's deliverance transformation often comes by a change of circumstance.

Psalms of repentance display transformation through accepting forgiveness and

responding with a contrite heart.

The New Testament portrays transformation on a different plane. The

overarching theme sees the old being made new (2 Cor.5:17). The epistles

continuously talk of the "former" way of things as well as "then" and "now"

comparisons (1 Peter 2:10). The immediacy of transformation shows up in the

New Testament, too. Jesus' miracles are full of transformation occurring

instantly and in dramatic fashion—transformations such as the lame walking, blind

seeing, and dead living.

The most significant transformation takes place in Revelation. The whole

earthly order is being altered (Rev.21:4-5). Overall, transformation possesses a

few key characteristics:

- Things never stay the same but always change into something better or worse, or at least different.
- Transformation in life and character is expected to those in Christ.

- Ultimate transformation will occur in the end.²⁹

The Importance of Place and Positioning

In the game of ice hockey, coaches commonly place one player in front of the opposing team's net. This strategic positioning provides numerous opportunities to score a goal. One scenario allows the puck to be passed to the player in front of the net for a shot from close range. Another option for this player may be to screen the goalie from a shot from further out. Finally, this player is in a location where there is a high probability of a rebound being made available from a previous shot. All these alternatives make this location in front of the opposing team's net an optimal place to position oneself. This can also be true of how Christians place themselves before God. A believer who places him or herself near to God will be more likely to encounter God. A choice presents itself daily that determines how one will (or won't) meet the Lord. The manner in which a person seeks to encounter the Lord reveals much about that individual's heart.

In Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus showed creativity and persistence in his desire to encounter the Savior. To overcome his limitations in both physical and social stature, he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree to see the Christ (19:4). As a result, Jesus visited Zacchaeus' house, and the tax collector eventually received the freedom of life in Christ (19:9).

²⁹ Leland Ryken and others, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 882-884.

From this text, it can be concluded that God honors a believer's attempt and initiative to meet with Him. The nature of the seeker's heart is expressed through the search for both innovative and traditional ways to commune with God. In the dance between a believer and God, the growth; health; and maturity of their relationship usually depends upon the believer's availability for God. God has already made every attempt to commune with mankind; now man must do his part.

The conditioning forces of the world have placed man in a posture of seeking and maintaining control. Many of man's daily efforts focus on acquiring more power to control life situations. In Luke 4:1-15, Jesus demonstrates an alternative use of power and control. He is tempted by Satan while in the wilderness and responds in accordance with His nature and mission. Jesus does not use the resources at His disposal with which Satan tempts Him; instead, He quotes the Word of God in His meekness and strength and then acts upon its requirements. The control and power observed here do not conform to the world system or the schemes of Satan, but rather express the obedience, submission, commitment, and selfless love He possesses for the Father.

One can learn much about the proper stewardship of wealth and resources from the following example of the raccoon. A method used to trap such an animal involves placing food in a cage with an opening large enough for the raccoon's paw. As he grabs the food, the opening closes tight around his leg. The tension on his leg would release if he put the food down; however, raccoons

usually are not willing to do this. The raccoon becomes trapped due to the power it lets its appetites possess over its will.

Humans often find themselves in the same situation. They have allowed their desires and appetites to go unchecked to the extent that submitting to them seems to be the only option. The rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-30 displays this reality. His allegiance lies in himself rather than his maker. In Acts 4:36-37, Barnabus reveals another method to deal with such an opportunity. Rather than hoard his possessions like the rich young ruler, he lays them at the feet of the apostles in the hopes of furthering the ministry of the gospel. Barnabus' choice allows him to experience freedom from the vice of greed and promotes his journey toward true personhood. The problem exists not in the possession of goods and wealth, but in the choice to view them as rightful belongings rather than God's loans (1Timothy 6:18). God desires the heart to be His and the material things of that heart will naturally be His as well (Luke 12:33-34).

In conclusion, the Holy Trinity acts as the most significant force in the transformation process. The relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit set the stage for man as he seeks to live life in community. The researcher believes this focus on the Trinity to be an effective means of perspective and living the Christian life because emerging adults are attuned to the concept of community and connectedness. So much of the substance found within the Trinitarian relationship is displayed in the symbol of the cross. The crucified life promotes the best chance of acquiring true personhood in full measure. Thus, the way one positions him or herself in this regard matters greatly. The content for

growing the spiritual lives of emerging adults has been laid out. The next chapter reveals what this content must confront as it journey toward a holistic spirituality continues. Also, chapter three investigates literature in the area of spiritual formation providing insight as to how various people are carrying out this process.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION & SOCIO- CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS

Chapter one introduced the need for emerging adults to develop a holistic spirituality in which to thrive within the current cultural climate. Chapter two presented a theological framework as a means to address the development of this spirituality. Now, the first part of chapter three attempts to investigate the socio-cultural norms present in the lives of emerging adults, particularly those of consumerism and individuality. The second part of this chapter surveys many of the theories suggested and practiced to aid spiritual growth. This literature review endeavors to provide insight into the heart and mind of emerging adults. It also hopes to discover ways individuals can grow in intimacy with their Savior and begin to combat the social-cultural pull they experience.

Consumeristic and Individualistic Tendencies of Emerging Adults

The thriving Christian life ideally ventures to recognize the desires and longings innately located in our souls and align ourselves with ways, methods, experiences, practices, and ultimately a lifestyle that moves toward true and authentic satisfaction. This satisfaction comes only in the context of a growing relationship with Christ; sadly, Christians frequently look to distorted attempts at satisfying these God given longings and desires through worldly means.

The categories of consumerism and individualism prove to be two of the most influential forces at work in the competition between a well-ordered and a disordered soul. The following pages investigate the causes and results of

straying into these areas—areas where believers become deceived and lose their bearing of the sacrificial Christ-centered life.

The most distilled description of Humanity's most intense longing and desire, in its barest description, is to be loved, and respected. A person may feel these needs fulfilled when he or she is accepted, valued, esteemed, cared for, or honored. These are virtuous hopes; however, when humans are left to seek their fulfillment through their own devices, then deformation occurs. Many of the decisions made in this current culture are fueled by these wrongly positioned desires.

Consumerism

Culture is simply what human beings make of the world in both senses, according to Ken Myers. It becomes, in one sense, what one interprets the world to be; in another, it becomes the product of ongoing creative contribution given by the individual. One aspect is interpretive and the other formative.

As individuals spend time in a given culture, they come to find tension at various points of their value or belief system and the process of living it out. Andy Crouch, cultural critic, believes culture hinders or facilitates certain decisions, lifestyles, and practices. He believes culture creates horizons of possibility or impossibility.³⁰ The culture at large determines whether an individual or community will have an easy or a difficult experience living by a set value system. This concept lies at the center of the tension emerging adults face

³⁰ Ibid.

as they attempt to test their beliefs in society: some may encounter very little resistance to their choices while others may confront enormous opposition.

For instance, a person living in America will likely adopt the attitude that these lifestyles are not excessive or extravagant. Much of western culture believes this, and marketers and advertising companies proudly take advantage of it with the new, next, and shiny. The subtle nature of consumerism is depicted colorfully by Rodney Clapp as he notes,

Consumerism is ... an ethos, a character-cultivating way of life that seduces and insinuates and acclimates. This... is consumption that militates against all kinds of Christian virtues, such as patience and contentedness and self denial, but almost always with a velvet glove rather than an iron fist. It speaks in tones sweet and sexy rather than dictatorial, and it conquers by promises rather than by threats.³¹

The influence of culture does not always have a negative effect. A significant benefit to increasing globalization is America's exposure to other countries, people groups, and ways of life. This may be a saving grace revealing the blind and numb existence toward which Western society has evolved. While the suburban lifestyle becomes drawn to the mega mall for all our needs, wants, and impulse purchases, a large group of people exists that focuses on the less material things of life. Because larger and larger portions of our lives are spent

³¹ Rodney Clapp, ed., *The Consuming Passion: Christianity and the Consumer Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 171.

eating, socializing, and shopping all in one location, spending time with people who do not expect a new car or iPod model might be good medicine.

Emerging adults swim in a pool of competing moral principles. They constantly have to negotiate, balance, compromise, and choose from amongst the myriad of options. Christian Smith articulates: “The moral order of mass consumer market capitalism and the advertising industry it deploys (. . .) does little to promote self-control, moderation, the common good, sacrifice, honor for others, and other traditional religious virtues among youth.”³² In place of these accepted morals, he argues that the new code promotes, “a moral order whose ‘virtues’ include self-gratification, contempt for traditional authorities, the commoditization of all value, and incessant material acquisition.”³³

The national context for emerging adults comes as a direct result of the American dream injected with a growth hormone. Technology, Hollywood’s ethics, and a free-floating worldview and theology have conditioned us to keep this capitalistic cash cow producing dividends. Consumers must provide a constant intentional effort to keep themselves from being ruled by the shiny, the new, and the next.

Only a truly naïve individual could blame a few limited causes for the mindset and life-style adopted by so many emerging adults today. However, the

³² Christian Smith, “Theorizing Religious Effects Among American Adolescents,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 42, no.1 (2003): 21.

³³ Ibid.

problem warrants an attempt to discover some of the most significant influences, though not all in the expansive and intricate system. One such influence is the amount of disposable income possessed by this population. No other time in history has a society at large had access to so many products and adventures.

China, as reported by U.S. News & World Report, affirms this concept. The report states, “An urban ‘young white-collar’ worker who earns as little as 5000 yuan (about \$625) per month typically still lives and eats with his parents and so may have almost 100 percent disposable income. It isn’t uncommon for this demographic to save for months to buy a brand-name handbag or pair of sneakers for hundreds of dollars.”³⁴

Tom Beaudoin shares, “the collective disposable income of youth in America is in the tens of millions of dollars. The average sixteen-year-old possesses around \$100 of disposable cash per week.”³⁵ Silverstein and Fiske resonate with this idea as they assert more Americans than ever have access to discretionary wealth to spend on these premium goods, which they believe is mostly caused by the increase in real income and home equity.³⁶

Because of consumerism, many people have become dependent upon power structures currently in place. The consumer in recent history has shifted

³⁴ Bay Fang, “Spending Spree.” *U.S. News & World Report*, 1 May 2006, 42-50.

³⁵ Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating who we are with what we buy* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 4.

³⁶ Michael J. Silverstein and Neil Fiske, *Trading Up: The New American Luxury* (New York: Portfolio, 2003), 10.

from demanding practical goods to demanding status symbols.³⁷ For example, pots and pans have practical value: a person can cook with them; a designer gown possesses primarily status value. However, goods that have been practical for years are beginning to have status value attached to them. Pots and pans that are the same brand and model used by the finest chefs in the world impress household visitors almost more than a well-cooked meal. This is the central principle utilized in the current hyper state of mass-consumer capitalism.

This idea is the foundation behind the behavior America has adopted, which Silverstein and Fiske identify in their 2003 book “Trading Up.” This behavioral shift places significant power in the hands of specific brands. For a stay-at-home wife, the traditional basic cooking range may not be adequate. A \$4000 Viking range speaks much louder to her friends of who she is and what she is about. A 50-year-old business man feels inadequate driving his 2000 Chevrolet in front of his colleagues, so he trades it in for a 2007 BMW 500 series. A high school student feels embarrassed and less successful because she will be attending the local state university compared to her friends who are all going to Ivy League or private schools. In all of these examples, the consumer is at no material disadvantage by keeping the less prestigious items; the consumer’s only disadvantage comes with the name association.

Another reason for the growth of a consumeristic cultural climate is the notion that individuals desire to trade up in relation to their goods, a phenomenon

³⁷ Murray Milner Jr., *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 157.

which has been effectively instituted by the marketing gurus. Consumers are purchasing commodities that do not satisfy a particular desire, but ones that fuel the desire for more things, the latest stuff, what's hot, and what's cool.³⁸ This affirms the notion that goods are being obtained for their status value rather than their practical significance.

The increasing focus upon leisure over a virtuous work ethic provides more fodder to fuel the consumeristic cultural climate. An individual's lifestyle outside of the work environment matters more than that person's job role and conduct, because the outside activities interest colleagues much more.³⁹ Emerging adults partake of this shift along with adults already established in their various workplaces. Culture has increased the importance of what someone does in his or her leisure time, and the advertising companies and commodity producers have capitalized on this notion.

The trend is to hoard money and time for the cherished part of life, usually the weekend, and splurge in the rare moments of freedom. Consumers pour astronomical figures into the leisure industry as it stands, and still new activities are dreamed up and added to the list daily. One example of this reality is the boom in sales in the outdoor adventure market. Bored workers spend their vacations, along with millions of dollars, on adventurous recreational pursuits such as kayaking, rock climbing, skiing, and mountain biking.

³⁸ Ibid., 172.

³⁹ Ibid.

These activities don't sell themselves on their own merits; rather, a lifestyle is peddled along with these activities—one that allow individuals to escape the urban jungle experience the serenity or the rush that results. The market for the goods needed to participate in this lifestyle is filled with high end specialty items that are sure to make the encounter all that it is meant to be, according to advertisers. Emerging adults consider \$300 on a Marmot sleeping bag, \$250 for a North Face jacket, and \$1500 on a Trek mountain bike to be a normal expense. The message conveyed by such purchases speaks with intentionality and significance.

The influx in the consumeristic cultural climate additionally links to the relationship between desire and technology. Now more than ever, technological advances are paired with the attack on the affections of a person's soul. Peter Whybrow notes, "By instinct we are geared for individual survival – curious, reward-driven, and self-absorbed – and technology is now in cahoots with that craving, having removed the natural constraints on human behavior of distance, sea, and mountain."⁴⁰ What may not have been a dangerous instinct initially has become uncontrollable now that it has been exploited. Whybrow goes on to state, To want more is a basic human instinct, one that has been essential to our survival. It was our hunger for better things, and the intelligence to imagine them, that gave us the mastery over the dangerous and depriving environment in which

⁴⁰ Peter C. Whybrow, *American Mania: When more Is Not Enough* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), xix.

we evolved (. . .) however, we now find ourselves in the confusing position of falling victim to our own acquisitive ambition.⁴¹

Women have become dominant role players in influencing consumption. The number of women in the work force has significantly increased in recent history as well as their salaries and spending power.⁴²

Furthermore, demographics reveal the American nuclear family is becoming less dominant. Individuals are getting married much later and having fewer children than in the past, so more singles spend their freed funds on themselves. The high divorce rate contributes to this phenomenon because when couples break up, their consumption habits change dramatically. New singles fight to reestablish their personal identity and how they present themselves to the world.⁴³

The Delivery System

*“...what you are being sold is a new vision of being yourself – a vision dependent on cultivating the envy and admiration of those around you.”*⁴⁴

Society at large is influenced toward more extreme consumeristic tendencies by an effective tool: the volatile combination of celebrity personality and the fragile self. Insecure personalities perceive a need to acquire New Luxury

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Silverstein, 10-12.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Debra Dean Murphy, *Teaching that Transforms: Worship at the Heart of Christian Education*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 123.

goods and experiences, so the power of celebrity and the lifestyle they peddle proves to be an incredibly successful delivery system. Everyone does not want or expect to be exactly like Tiger Woods or Paris Hilton, but people will take cues from them and align themselves with a purse or set of clubs the celebrities deem worthwhile.

The rise of celebrity has become a major factor in the pursuit to satisfy these largely emotional desires. The media invades and entices the appetites of the self through the lives of the rich and famous. Possessing some of the material goods and similar experiences these individuals have gives the false perception that this will create a similar identity that leads to the fame, esteem, and acceptance that they have. This is part of the lie behind the brand epidemic present today.

We all receive countless messages every day—especially from the media influencers and celebrity endorsers—urging us to reach for our dreams, fulfill our emotional needs, go for the gusto, self-actualize, take care of ourselves, and feel good about who we are (. . .). These messages are often intertwined with, or linked to, New Luxury goods. Oprah Winfrey endorses products, Martha Stewart sells them, Sarah Jessica Parker and her friends on *Sex and the City* display them.⁴⁵

Emerging adults are shopping for something worthwhile with which to associate themselves. One of the clearest pictures of this practice is sports. Recently, the U.S. Men's National soccer team's loss to Ghana removed them from a chance to win the 2006 World Cup. This reality produced a sense of depression on a national scale. Why? Because true sports fans live their lives

⁴⁵ Silverstein, 12.

through their team. Identifying oneself with something provides excitement, entertainment, meaning, possibility, community, journey, and exploration.

The consumeristic mentality associating ourselves with the best sports team is no different than aligning ourselves with cars, clothes, career, house, technologies, entertainment, and experiences that all possess and express a story and message. Emerging adults choose deliberately what objects to place on their canvas and how to arrange them. Each of these items possesses a story line others read and use to develop assumptions about them. Consciously or not, they have adopted this reality and to some extent become a slave to this system. To move in a different direction and not pay homage to this practice takes intentionality and proves to be incredibly difficult.

James Twitchell drills down a little deeper to provide insight into this phenomenon. He states, “It is not objects that people really desire, but their lush coating of images and dreams that mesh with a wider promotional culture fueled by advertising and broadcast media (. . .). It is never the object which is consumed – instead, it is the relationship between us and the object of desire.”⁴⁶ Affirming these ideas and adding color to the issue, Tom Beaudoin reveals, “By focusing on branding, companies hope to make their logos into a ‘personality’ [They] ‘emote a distinctive persona.’”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ James B. Twitchell, *Branded Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 37.

⁴⁷ Beaudoin, 4.

The root cause of aligning ourselves with chosen brands is the longing for a specific lifestyle and the perception of an identity that brings self-fulfillment. It centers upon living a life that the product or service or concept purportedly provides. Each product or commodity stands for a larger reality that sends a message to an on-looking world. These products and commodities are used as a sociological map to position a person in a specific strata, tribe, or esteemed identity.

Recently philosophers have adopted the idea that we all “perform” our identity. Our speech patterns, gestures, clothing styles, and various verbal and nonverbal cues reveal who we are as much as who we are is “given” to us naturally. Beaudoin concludes clothes and other branded products do “identity work” for us, transmitting messages about ourselves to ourselves and others.⁴⁸

In both China and India, emerging adults are increasingly conscious of the brands they buy and the quality of the product. “Brands are fueling the rise of the middle class in China ... the Chinese have an aching ambition to climb up the ladder of success, and brands are the mark of people who have made it.”⁴⁹

Companies have capitalized on this tendency. The companies that produce and market such commodities use this reality for their benefit. They recognize the power held by these items and use it unashamedly to foster greater dividends. James Twitchell claims, “A brand is a story that travels with a product

⁴⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁹ Fang, 46.

or service or... a concept.”⁵⁰ Andy Crouch, author and cultural critic, calls a brand an identity with a commodity. Ilan Sobel, a vice president for strategic marketing for Coke, says, “Chinese youth are yearning for their own identity ... They are going from a collectivist society to having a new freedom. We are constantly looking for new ways to inspire them.”⁵¹

Many theorists consider society as something becoming more individualistic, but many others consider it less so. Two examples may help decide which side is correct. Firstly, General Mills has come out with mix and match cereal where an individual is able to take any combination of cereal and customize it however he or she desires. Furthermore, Tower Records encourages their customers to make their own CD in the store with any music they have for sale.

Individualism is not the radical lifestyle and statement it was a generation ago. It now has become mainstream and been adopted as the norm. Baby boomers brought the concept and practice of individualism off of the sidelines, and this became the backbone of much transition and revolution in the 1960s. Today, the emerging adult generation has taken individualism to new heights and intensities. The rise of the self above all competitors has become the mantra of the day. As a result, “We are a people in constant need of prefabricated ways to

⁵⁰ Twitchell, 47.

⁵¹ Fang, 50.

announce our difference and specialness.”⁵² Emerging adults have been affirmed continually through their childhood and beyond of their uniqueness and their exceptional nature.

One self-proclaimed individualist confesses this disappointing discovery: “I’m a rebel sanctioned by society, encouraged by my parents, and cheered on by Hallmark, what is left to rebel against? (. . .) Society as a whole has scooped me into a warm, fuzzy, loving, be-yourself embrace.”⁵³

Robert Bellah and his colleagues affirm this testimony by noting, “...the American individualist, who flees from home and family leaving the values of community and tradition behind, is secretly a conformist.”⁵⁴ The radical individualist has slowly become that which he most adamantly feared to become: society’s norm.

Andrée Seu, a columnist for World Magazine, shares, “When you don’t have an internal sense of self, you need an external—and constant supply of it. You’re condemned to roam the earth a parasite.”⁵⁵ Living out of a solidified (or at least solidifying) identity is the only true way to avoid being a slave to outside affirmation. It is the fear of being outside the inner ring that drives the decisions

⁵² Hal Niedzviecki, *Hello I’m Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2006), 18.

⁵³ Ibid., intro.xiii.

⁵⁴ Robert N. Bellah and others, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 148.

⁵⁵ Andree Seu, “Be Somebody: Finding Affirmation in Christ or Spend a Lifetime in Terror of Standing Outside the ‘Local Ring,’” *World Magazine*, 27 May 2006, 39.

and motives in most individuals. The desire to be included, respected, loved, and known propels the kind of life individuals lead. If these items are not tied to a relationship with the Creator then they are left to position and attach themselves to items appealing to the senses and desires that surface.

A Way Out

Bellah and his colleagues propose two modes within which people are able to relate and function. The first level is that of the modern self-reliant individual. The purpose and values behind this way of living are self-advancement and self-determined success. Often, success in this lifestyle is measured by income and consumption.

The second level of language Bellah mentions is tied to something larger than the individual or popular opinion. It is described as biblical and civic individualism.⁵⁶ These are specific practices—ritualistic, aesthetic, and/or ethical in nature—in which the community engages. A sense of loyalty and heart-felt obligation motivate those involved. Concern for the greater good and the other are commonplace. The practice of these habits and lifestyle foster the need and awareness that keep the community sensing its purpose, usefulness and calling. This second level of language correlates with the Christ-like life believers are to adopt and practice.

⁵⁶ Bellah, 154.

As seen in the increasingly popular body art, such as tattoos and piercings, this generation places aesthetic expression in high position. It has been expected and culturally promoted to discover fresh and creative ways to display the body. Great time and effort have been given for the development of a unique and truly individual expression of each person.

The positive aspect from this movement is the return toward a more holistic way of living our spirituality. In recent history, the trend in much of evangelicalism has been toward the aesthetic. Previously, any focus on the physical or material part of creation has been viewed as wrong and misplaced. This current shift lends itself toward a more accurate biblical theology of the human person and God's creation as a whole. It provides a renewed emphasis on humanity's physical nature at the table of biblical spirituality.

As with most things, some people have taken this movement and pulled it toward the extreme. A fear driving emerging adults is that only those who visibly display their value system will be esteemed and respected. Those individuals who choose not to visibly express their values may be viewed as repressive and backwards.

This reality may also create a rift between generations (boomer v. emerging adult). Jean Twenge asserts that emerging adults, who openly display their beliefs, value truth and honesty while the boomer generation, which conceals opinions, values politeness and respectfulness. Much of the generation tension experienced in churches and society as a whole can be attributed to this statement. Emerging adults today give greater allegiance to being honest and authentic; they

search for outward symbols of these qualities. Being polite and respectful seems deceitful within younger circles. The boomers view an emerging adult's honesty and authenticity as harsh, socially unacceptable and entirely uncalled-for.

The outcomes that appear from self-obsession provide an eroding stage from which to perform. Jean Twenge's research led her to three recurrent themes: the obsession with appearance, the extension of adolescence beyond all previous limits, and materialism.⁵⁷ Evidence of these attributes can be observed in their fullness from a quick glance of our cultural landscape.

An emerging adult's obsession with appearance forcibly displays itself in American society. From reality shows that provide makeovers using plastic surgery to weight loss programs that use any methodology accessible to man as long as it achieves the desired results, self-obsession has become commonplace. Emerging adults dish out an incredible amount of time, money, and energy in large sums to construct their desired personae. Huge portions of emerging adult's lives are given to image development and management.

In recent years, the age range in which researchers consider someone to be an adolescent has lengthened. Traditionally, an adolescent was defined as an individual between 13-18 years of age. Today, that range has spread to include youth as young as 10 years old and as old as 25 years.

⁵⁷Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 94-103.

This expansion of age range allows those emerging adults in the 18-25 year old range to avoid responsibility for a few more years. This group is able to live a lifestyle that possesses more resources to spend on the self and its desires. In a time where emerging adults have more time, more money, and more goods available to them, it should not be a surprise these developments have occurred.

These two factors have led to the logical result of materialism. This reality reveals the strong connection between the individualistic self and the mass consumer capitalistic culture.

Emerging Adulthood

Jean Twenge has not been alone in her field of research, but rather over past few years much research has been conducted on the 18-24 year old category. One of the most noted scholars in this area is Jeffery Arnett, who labeled this sector of society as “emerging adults.”

His research points out this shift that has taken place in recent history: The traditional markers of adulthood, entering marriage and parenthood, have been extended from the late teens and early twenties to late twenties and early thirties. Arnett points to three main factors that explain why this is the new reality. The first reason he cites is the invention of the birth control pill along with less stringent standards of sexuality; second is the increase in the years individuals devote to pursuing higher education; third he attributes the changed mindset to the changing role of women.

According to Arnett, emerging adults possess the following characteristics:

- Identity exploration (especially in love, work, and faith)
- Instability
- Self-focus
- An age of feeling-in-between, in transition, and neither adolescent nor adult
- An age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, and when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.⁵⁸

The emerging adult phenomenon and the intensity with which it imposes its values on this population depend on the socio-cultural context individuals find themselves within. Arnett draws the following conclusions regarding the cultural context of emerging adults:

It has occurred only recently and only in some cultures.

- It “Exists today mainly in the industrialized or “postindustrial” countries of the West, along with Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea.”
- Cultures rather than countries manifest this characteristic.
- Its may vary among the cultures within a country. (Ex. Mormons have a shortened and highly structured emerging adulthood.)
- Variations in socioeconomic status and life circumstances also determine the extent to which a given young person may experience emerging adulthood. (Ex. A teenage mother will shorten her period of emerging adulthood.)

⁵⁸ Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

- Social class may be more important than ethnicity. Young people in the middle class or above have a lengthened and freer period of emerging adulthood.
- In economically developing countries, urban and rural eras evince a distinct cultural split. Young people in urban areas of countries such as China and India are more likely to experience emerging adulthood. This is somewhat true in the US as well.
- Globalization and the world economy have expanded emerging adulthood's horizons. This will grow as more developing countries make secondary school a normative experience.⁵⁹

Emotions and Consumer Spending

Silverstein and Fiske describe the emotional relationship with the attainment of New Luxury goods as four emotional spaces affecting consumer buying behavior and closely linked to the purchase of New Luxury goods.

Because most Americans feel overworked and time-deprived, they are looking for ways to reward themselves, get a few moments alone, rejuvenate the exhausted body, soothe the frayed emotions, and even restore the soul. These feelings lead to excessive purchases of unnecessary items, and even shopping addiction.

This is about finding, building, maintaining, and deepening relationships with people who are important to us. This need divides further into three

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21-23.

subspaces: attracting mates, belonging with friends and groups, and nurturing family members. Frequently, connecting takes place in spending situations.

Emerging adults desire to test their strength against the world. They venture out, gain new experiences, and push back personal limits. These expeditions include adventure, learning, mastery, and fun—preferably all mixed together. Of course, every quest requires a new set of weapons to go with it.

People long to express personal taste in order to differentiate themselves from others as well as demonstrate sophistication and success.⁶⁰ These experiments with self expression oftentimes head in a few directions (and shopping malls) before settling on a specific style.

Effects of Recent Cultural Shifts

“Faith and spirituality (have) become centered around self and personal realization and happiness instead of Christ, God, and truth.”⁶¹

Jensen and Arnett state from their research that there is relatively low religious participation by those in their late teens and early twenties in American society. The reasons behind the drop in religious participation are the freedom young people discover after they move out from their parents’ house, becoming busy with other activities, doubting previously held beliefs, or simply losing

⁶⁰ Silverstein, 45-46.

⁶¹ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 175.

interest in being involved in a religious institution.⁶² However, they note religious participation usually increases in the late twenties, as young people marry, become parents, settle down personally and geographically, and express an increased spiritual need for religious involvement.⁶³

Researchers such as Beaudoin and Arnett reveal skepticism in young adults toward religious institutions and religious authorities.⁶⁴ Upon observing young adults' identity development in general, the characteristic shifts, openness, free floating, and constant evolving in their faith journeys should come as no surprise. Their opposition towards institutions and authority stems from negative past experiences as well as the idea that submitting to these entities is viewed as a compromise to their individuality.

Smith and Denton describe the spirituality of emerging adults as, “renarrated for all comers as personal integration, subjective feeling, and self improvement toward individual health and personal well-being – and no longer has anything to do with, for example, religious faith and self-discipline toward holiness or obedience.”⁶⁵

⁶² Jeffery Jensen Arnett and Lene Arnett Jensen, “A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 17 no.5 (September 2002): 451-452.

⁶³ Ibid., 452.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 175.

Parents have shifted the values they most desire to instill in their children over the past century. One hundred or so years ago, parents taught their children obedience and respect; today, parents want their children primarily to acquire independence and self-esteem. This paradigm shift has resulted in some devastating effects on emerging adults' faith as well as in their development in general. According to Jensen and Arnett,

Emerging adulthood is a period of the life course when the focus tends to be on self-development and self-sufficiency; in addition, today's emerging adults are coming of age in an especially individualistic period in American society. . . . A strong majority of Americans agree that individuals should form their religious beliefs independently of religious institutions.⁶⁶

This population increasingly places higher and higher value on independent thinking, which creates a more strongly individualized set of beliefs. Emerging adults highly value opportunities to ask religiously charged questions; however, they will reject the responses if they appear to consist of ready-made dogma. The opportunity to dialogue on issues of faith will open remain only as long as the parties evince mutual respect and opportunities for the adults to think for themselves.

There has been speculation regarding the impact of the religious influence during an individual's upbringing and the correlation toward the eventual beliefs held by that individual during young adulthood. The trend has been that religious socialization in childhood has had a low level of influence for the young adult's

⁶⁶ Ibid., 453.

faith development, which indicates religion is another region in which young adults attempt to declare their individualism and ability to think for themselves. The sources that seem to have greater impact on their religious beliefs are their peers and pop culture.⁶⁷ Perhaps the church doesn't affect young adults as fully because of its absence of influence during the formative period. It has not done an adequate job in terms of socialization of this population.

The religious participation of young adults is low, and although it rises significantly as this population enters into marriage and parenthood, the intense individualism of this group remains.⁶⁸ Young adults, "have concluded that (. . .) their beliefs are best observed not through regular participation in a religious institution with other, like-minded believers, but by themselves, in the privacy of their own hearts and minds, in a congregation of one."⁶⁹

Smith and Denton use the term "moral therapeutic deism" to illustrate the religious beliefs of emerging adults. This term is defined by the following characteristics:

- A God who exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be nice, good, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

⁶⁷ Arnett, "A Congregation of One", 465.

⁶⁸ Arnett, "A Congregation of One", 465.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.⁷⁰

This list is one of the most significant findings compiled over the last few years because of the thorough and detailed research that went into it. It gives an accurate pulse of the emerging adult spirituality, particularly in that the overall description of God appears to be self-affirming and accommodating.

Over time, societies' values and practices change. The surprising factor when looking at North American culture over the past hundred years is the pace and intensity at which the change has occurred. "America's traditional immigrant values of resourcefulness, thrift, prudence, and our abiding concern for family and community have been hijacked by a commercially driven, all-consuming self-interest that is rapidly making us sick."⁷¹

Social critic David Brooks discusses the differences between emerging adults before World War I and now. The most significant distinction he discovered was the educational philosophy in the pre-WWI era was relatively unconcerned with academic achievement but went to enormous lengths to instill character. Today, the system places enormous emphasis on achievement and

⁷⁰ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.

⁷¹ Whybrow, preface xviii.

finds itself lost on the question of what makes a virtuous life.⁷² To support this argument Brooks quotes John Hibben's commencement address to the class of 1913, "You, enlightened, self-sufficient, self-governed, endowed with gifts above your fellows. . . . The world commands you to take your place and to fight your fight in the name of honor and chivalry. . . . Such is your vocation; follow the voice that calls you in the name of God."⁷³

Brooks contrasts this with the "Class of 2001" reflecting:

They are responsible. They are generous. They are bright. But, they live in a country that has lost, in its frenetic seeking after happiness and success, the language of sin and character-building through combat with sin. Evil is seen as something that can be cured with better education, or therapy, or Prozac. Instead of virtue we talk about accomplishment.⁷⁴

The old ethic of life still remains in the conversation and lives of the WWII generation. Possibly the wisest investment of the emerging adult community would be to spend a significant portion of their time and relational equity with those who hold a much different outlook on life. Listening to stories of self-sacrifice, poverty, and hardship of almost every sort may be the catalyst needed for transformation to begin.

Cultural Conditioning

The number of choices available to people in society has changed the discernment dynamic present today in a multitude of ways. In 1920, decisions

⁷² Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 111.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

regarding the brand and model of an automobile, athletic shoe, or Bible-believing church were fairly easy. Today, adults tend to become overwhelmed and even paralyzed by the possibilities. This acquired trait has a significant impact of the way individuals live out their spirituality. For example, emerging adults encounter increased tension in their lives as they try to decide who to marry. Numerous books, websites, and seminars have been created for this sole purpose. In a more general sense, Christians have increasingly begun to focus on determining the will of God over the past few decades. These realities express the complexity and obsession Christians often experience in the current culture.

These huge areas of freedom affect our overall thinking patterns, emotional stability, and worldview by creating an incoherent and schizophrenic worldview. The value or belief held in one area of life does not match one found in another. Adults become people who live and make choices based on felt or sold needs and not on Biblical values. The standard of quality that is used to support a choice has become self-centered, and has discarded the best interest of the community. Unfortunately, what's best for the group most often happens to be the best for the individual as well.

Our sales pitch culture creates an environment of dissatisfaction, which affects relationships, churches, and vocation, to name a few areas. Adults acquire a posture that longs to take and use, though seldom give for the sake of another.

Smith and Denton describe a self that evolves into a pattern of life that is individual, autonomous, rational, self-seeking, and cost-benefit calculating.⁷⁵

This authoritative self offers its strength to the capitalistic system, which takes the strength and abuses the self. Once the self gives away power, the system begins to take more beyond our volition regardless of whether we are aware or not. The structure of society is positioned to take hold of the soul of man if given the opportunity. Mass consumer capitalism thrives in our land and runs directly contrary to the value system and ethics Jesus speaks of and displays in the New Testament. As a result, the life of discipleship becomes increasingly difficult to appropriate when these forces are in place. It becomes crucial that Christians pursue this life more fervently and intentionally than ever.

Spiritual Formation Literature Review

Thirst and Hunger for a Deeper Journey and Connection

As human beings, many people long to enjoy quality time with someone else and know that through the conversation, they have more deeply connected with God and that other individual. The fullness of the soul from times such as these breeds a sense of thankfulness, gratitude, significance, and a thirst for more of the same. A person becomes anxious at times for further dialogue and connection like this. The seemingly innocuous desire can become dangerous, however; one must be cautious not to manipulate or force such an experience.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 176.

The Holy Spirit directs and orchestrates these moments of in-depth discovery, not humans.

These instances produce contemplative and prayer and reflection about who God is, who man is, and with what God calls man to engage. After these periods, one comes away refreshed, enthused, passionate, and open to new ways of viewing things. Perhaps these feelings come from God allowing an experience of His unlimited spring of living water, as discussed by the Psalmist in Psalm 1. Whatever the exact source, the freshness and fulfillment convince those who experience them that these periods are not initiated on Earth.

The Importance of Cross-Generational Conversation

As a young adult spends time with his or her parents' and grandparents' generation, that person becomes appreciative of the elders' solid theological truths, clear gospel, and lives that desire to live it out. They have been faithful to preserve and guard the truth like Christians are commanded in Paul's letter to Timothy. However, a person may become frustrated as he or she attempts to connect with them in a significant dialogue pertaining to their experience of the spiritual life. Of course, this is a stereotype and there may be a number of reasons for this disconnect. The problem could be a result of differences in temperament and personality type, modeling, cultural context, or church background.

God may be calling the younger generation into deeper relational intimacy with our God and Savior. There is much of the "hidden-ness" of God that emerging adults may not have the benefit of experiencing throughout a period of history. He may have placed this thirst and awareness in the hearts and minds of

this generation for a renewed connection with God. Additionally, He knows what the world needs from the church to represent and minister influentially.

As emerging adults journey into a new century, they have a new take on spiritual formation as they revamp, redefine, reform, and redesign it. The goal is not to attempt to strip away what our forefathers have handed down, but to build upon it for the purpose of raising up divinely, humanly, and culturally connected apprentices of Christ.

Where to Begin: The Creation Story

In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make man in our own image, according to our likeness. . . .” This statement reveals some key insights toward man’s relationship with the creator. First, God modeled humanity after Himself—all of Himself, which means the Trinity. Therefore, humans can engage this divine community in order to understand how to live life in its original intention. Second, because the Trinity is the ideal community, it can provide vital understanding of how to participate in earthly communities and relationships. Third, the state in which humanity finds itself now (after the fall) is not the intended ideal in which it is to remain.

This divine and eternal story provides the basis of reality. It is the story against which all other stories—individual and corporate—are measured. This story includes four main elements: the three persons of the Trinity in all their fullness, the authority of scripture, the witness of creation, and the testimony of the Church throughout history.

In man's pursuit of authentic spiritual formation, God grants the equipment necessary for the journey. In particular, the scripture reveals truth and the Trinity provides the context for the Christian life—that is, the relationships within the Godhead offer the standard to which all other relationships are measured. The relational atmosphere developed and expressed by the Trinity demonstrates the context in which growth and transformation best occurs.

Paul affirms this point in Colossians 3:9-10 by saying, “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created them. . . .” The only way to align a life for the purpose of the kingdom is to commune with the One who created and knows it best. It is through knowing God more deeply that one begins to know oneself more fully. Ken Baugh and Rich Hurst explain, “As young adults learn to trust God for who he is, they will slowly learn to trust him for who they are. They will begin to understand their true identity in Christ.”⁷⁶

The Human Story

“We strive continually to adorn and preserve our imagery self, neglecting the true one.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ken Baugh and Rich Hurst, *The Quest for Christ: Discipling Today's Young Adults* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2003), 162.

⁷⁷ Baugh, 153.

Most people toil away to maintain the appearance of their imaginary self, the self they desire the outside world to see. However, they can only play the game so long before the effects of the Fall and their depraved nature bursts in to reveal the true self. Whether through circumstances or relationships, man is continually confronted with the neediness of the soul. Henry Cloud and John Townsend hold that, “The role we must take in life is not only for dependency, but also against self sufficiency. Our role is to recognize our limits and to transcend those limits by looking outside ourselves for life.”⁷⁸

As a person assesses the state of his or her soul, that person becomes aware of an intense urge to control. This posture declares a sense of fear, distrust, and anxiety at the core of the inner life, and often results in scheming and manipulation toward others and circumstances for self-centered purposes.⁷⁹ This atmosphere also destroys the freedom God has to work in the believer’s life. It pushes Him to the margins and employs Him as a puppet to achieve the self directed goals man has instituted. God has come to destroy and redeem this posturing.

Salvation’s Ongoing Story

In redemption, everything of man’s returns to its rightful place before God. The redemption of the soul causes retreat from independence and from God

⁷⁸ Cloud, Henry and John Townsend, *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 31.

⁷⁹ Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 87.

in an attempt to be self-made.⁸⁰ Cloud and Townsend state that, “True growth begins with realizing that we are ‘Poor in spirit,’ and from this humble position reaching out to God and receiving all that He has for us” (Matt 5:3).⁸¹ This describes the positioning and posture of the soul that allows God to have free reign to carry out transformation.

Jesus’ disciples postured their souls to allow the needed growth to occur. Mulholland notes that the way they ordered their lives molded their character and dynamics of being so they could transcend destructive events. He continues by saying, “It is the deeper order revealed in the incarnation, an order that accepts crucifixion and transforms its death into eternal life.”⁸² Here one gains perspective that relocates self to its proper place and allows God to be rightfully Lord.

Attaining Freedom in Christ

In discovering the essence of humanity, the believer’s battle with idolatry cannot go unacknowledged. Jim Wilhoit, professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College, proclaims, “To be alive is to be an idolater.”⁸³ This never-ending struggle to deal with the idols that entice reveals human limitations and

⁸⁰ Cloud, 36-37.

⁸¹ Ibid., 37.

⁸² Mulholland, 88.

⁸³ Jim Wilhoit, “Transforming Discipleship: Leading the Church in Spiritual Formation” (Presentation, Spiritual Formation Forum, Los Angeles, CA, May 19, 2004).

requires transcendent intervention. Left to his own accord, man will continually be pulled toward the things that glisten (Isaiah 40:18-20). Once a person acknowledges these idols honestly and courageously, his or her soul will feel and exhibit humanity in all its fullness. This humble and contrite positioning of the heart allows redemption to be fully actionable because God's power manifests out of the acknowledgment of brokenness and poverty.

Cloud and Townsend ask the question, "What needs reconciliation?"⁸⁴ Much of the world culture and self-story needs to be crucified, and likewise much of the divine story can bring healing, redemption and reconciliation to these areas. Therefore, a repentant and seeking person must detach from idols and attach to truth and grace.

This is the environment where freedom in Christ begins to be experienced. Being liberated from dependency on self and its dictatorship allows and promotes the true self into the realm of fulfilling its true and glorious purpose.

Where Embodied Truth and Fallen Humanity Intersect: A Destination

Openly confessing idols and earthly rubbish of the soul allows God to express His redemption, grace, power, and comfort. He wants to take lives of deformation and create lives of transformation. This thesis project deals primarily with this particular position of the soul. The spiritual life focuses above all on the encounter of God's truth and transcendence with humanity and its depravity, for

⁸⁴ Cloud, 27.

true soul work and spiritual transformation comes from such an encounter. David Benner sums it up by saying, “The goal of the Christian spiritual journey is not to become less human and more divine; it is to become more fully human. Salvation is not to rescue us from our humanity; it is to redeem our humanity.”⁸⁵

Virtuous Knowing through True Education

Education has proven to be a cousin to spiritual formation and development. If education in its purest and truest form affects all of life, then it must therefore be spiritual in nature. Parker Palmer, one of the leading thinkers and practitioners in the field of education, has had a significant influence on the field of spiritual formation. In his book *To Know as We Are Known*, he offers much insight to glean in the process of developing a more holistic spiritual formation paradigm.

Thomas Merton has said that the purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously *in relation to his world*.⁸⁶ Thus, an individual’s reality provides the structure and framework from which education occurs. Accordingly, a person who lives in a false reality will undergo a distorted education. Because everyone to some extent has a skewed reality as a result of the Fall, the believer’s life in Christ is a process of redeeming true reality to discover the practice of true education.

⁸⁵ David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 35.

⁸⁶ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), 12.

Merton continues to say that self and world are the great subjects of education and freedom, and truth the great goals.⁸⁷ Again, the words freedom and truth need definition to make sense of humankind's great purpose, but in today's cultural landscape, these words change to meet the needs of any given moment. From a biblical point of view, "freedom in Christ," and, "the practice of truth," of scripture are noble goals of spiritual formation.

Hindrances to True Education

A person's definition of self and world depends directly upon his or her view of reality. Parker Palmer notes that, "Self creates the world by means of projection," and, "World creates the self by means of conditioning."⁸⁸ These statements outline a large part of the dilemma. The self displays the world like a large data projector onto the screen in front of it, and defines everything shown on the screen (interpretation and perception of the world). All that is revealed is based on a narrow, individual, and fallible perspective. To hold to such a model is deceptive, dangerous, and arrogant.

The concept of the "self being conditioned by the world" places a person in the role of either victim or exploiter.⁸⁹ From the moment a person is in one of these roles, he or she begins to fight for power, which destroys virtuous education. If selfish gain of power and control are the goals of education, true knowledge of

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 13.

“other” cannot result. Such a dynamic will always destroy communication, not fortify it.

A Resolution

Palmer proposes a solution or escape from living in this paradigm. He suggests an individual needs to transcend the ensnaring system and foster the discovery of authentic freedom and truth.⁹⁰ “To experience transcendence,” he says, “means to be removed—not from self and world, but from that hall of mirrors in which the two endlessly reflect and determine one another.”⁹¹ To begin this restoration, a person must start by confessing that the Creator is the only One who is connected to direct knowing. Allowing Him into the process brings life, love, and perfection; without his involvement, knowing and education remain distorted and dysfunctional.

Embracing the Revolutionized Soul

The result of such a transcendent education, states Palmer, allows us “to see beyond appearances into the hidden realities of life—beyond fact into truth, beyond self-interest into compassion, beyond our flagging energies, and nagging despairs into the love required to renew the community creation.”⁹² This reality removes people from the closed system driven by self, felt needs, power, and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

control; it turns all toward the frightening realm of dependence and trust in the Eternal Other for all of life.

Two Types of Knowing

Palmer uses Adam and Eve to exemplify the human impulse toward knowing in a distorted way. He illuminates their ill-begotten quest for a knowledge that distrusted and excluded God. Their desire to know came from curiosity, control, and desire to have attributes belonging to God alone, but not from love. They refused to know as they were known.⁹³

The image of knowing through the context of love can be viewed as reconciling the world itself. Such reconciliation must be founded upon Christ's ongoing redemptive work. Knowing through love means knowing in truth, because God is love and truth. Palmer provides insight in this search for a virtuous epistemology by explaining,

To know truth is to become betrothed, to engage the known with one's whole self, an engagement one enters with attentiveness, care, and good will. To know in truth is to allow one's self to be known as well, to be vulnerable to the challenges and changes any true relationship begins. To know in truth is to enter into the life of that which we know and to allow it to enter into ours. Truth involves entering a relationship with someone genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately found.⁹⁴

This type of knowing has vast implications for the community. Palmer notes that truth is discovered in the dialogue between persons—knowers and

⁹³ Ibid., 25.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 31.

knowns—who are understood as independent but accountable selves.⁹⁵ This takes place within the context of an interplay of selves, ideas, and worlds with the willingness to change for the better. For true dialogue and knowing to take place, a person must resign his or her tendency to be a slave to personal needs and desires.

From this reality of knowing in the context of truth, community, and love, authentic culture transformation must be public and not private. Private knowing and culture formation does a weak job of promoting the common good as God has designed.

Theology of Experience

In *Making Sense of Church*, Spencer Burke asks, “Does knowledge change people? Or does the experience?”⁹⁶ The place and role of experience has been watered down or gone missing in most evangelical spiritualities. Christians either lean toward using experience for the basis of their faith or they de-emphasize its importance.

If believers are called to know, live, and practice the compassion that their Savior modeled, then experience is crucial to development. Someone can study numerous books and take university courses on the issue of AIDS in Africa, but a trip to Uganda or the Sudan would be the impetus for life-changing conviction.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁶ Spencer Burke, *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations about God, Community, and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 101.

Such a trip would engage the emotions and affections in a significant way: the experience would cultivate a way of knowing the situation and surrounding issues so deep that studied knowledge would be superficial and shallow. Experience, with all its sensory details, creates convictions founded out of engagement and participation that hang upon the skeleton of Biblical truth.

Bruce Demarest, professor at Denver Seminary, states, “Through experience, the teachings of scripture come to life in the very chambers of our heart.”⁹⁷ The physical body becomes the medium through which God reveals true understanding and knowing to His people. With the encounter of each situation and event, people reflect and contemplate on Scriptural truth in their mind. This is the beginning of knowing holistically, where head and heart partner for spiritual growth.

Jonathan Edwards speaks of the importance of the heart’s affections. “True religion must include the cultivation of the heart’s affections. A person who does not possess affections that stir the soul is not growing in Christ.”⁹⁸ By going through specific experiences, a person comes to appreciate truth—and thus God the creator of truth—on a deeper level. Klaus Issler, in his book *Wasting Time With God*, provides a great analogy of this issue.

In a marriage, wives can make love, enjoy it and even bear children without ever having experienced the fullness, the intimacy, and the ecstasy

⁹⁷ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 101.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 102-103.

of complete union with their loved one. Positionally, yes, they are one with their husbands, but experientially they don't have the slightest clue as to what it means to truly be 'one'.”⁹⁹

Worship and Idolatry

Robert Webber defines worship as “A meeting between God and His peoples.”¹⁰⁰ To worship Him “in spirit and truth,” two results should occur (John 4:23). One, man's spirit, or inner soul, must be presented to God to be affected by His nature. Two, to worship “in truth,” one must allow one's heart, mind, and soul to be confronted by the truth of who God is and who He has created each individual to be.

Authentic worship should cause people to lay themselves bare before their Creator and allow Him to investigate their souls. Worship must engage with the movement of the Holy Spirit as He desires to search out the inner most places. The level of a person's vulnerability in this activity directly correlates to the amount of spiritual formation that he or she will experience.

Richard Averbeck of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School states that worship “Is the most transforming experience we engage in (. . .) and it provides

⁹⁹ Klaus Issler, *Wasting Time with God: A Christian Spirituality of Friendship with God*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 22.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 112.

the context for all else.”¹⁰¹ Worship is to be transformational and the context for spiritual formation, so we must know how this happens and what it looks like.

This is not to be confused with idolatry, which only provides temporary feelings of transcendence. Idolatry will not allow God to investigate the soul; it will stop short at an emotional or even physical high and nothing more.

Worship in its truest form confronts, reveals, and kills content which is contrary to God’s truth. If a person allows him or her self to be placed in such a position, God will perform significant soul surgery. The Spirit’s encounter with the sin in a person’s life brings the power and conviction for a more God-honoring life (John 16:8). However, the Spirit does not leave anyone in the rubble and destruction; He plays the role of the comforter, counselor, and helper as well (John 14:26).

He begins to reveal the path of healing and wholeness, and so directs and guides toward the life God intended. Larry Crabb explains, “If we allow ourselves to become broken, great power may be manifested from it, a pathway to joy can be developed” (Hosea 7:14).¹⁰² This sounds great in theory, but the emotion of the individual often forces one to run in the other direction when such an encounter actually takes place. A person should know how to be sure this is in essence a profitable thing.

¹⁰¹ Richard Averbeck, “Biblical Spiritual Formation” (Keynote session at the Spiritual Formation Forum, Los Angeles, CA, May 21, 2004).

¹⁰² Ibid.

Changing the Will

Richard Averbeck mentions that the will (volition) changes when an individual changes the things that impress him or her.¹⁰³ To change these things, one must first know what causes a person to become impressed with something. First, people must have some exposure to the task. Just sharing its environment makes them more aware of the task's importance. Second, people begin to participate in the task. For example, a person ministering in the Bible College setting becomes impressed with its crucial role in equipping the next generation of Christian leaders. Third, people observe a task's importance being modeled and assimilate it into their own cognition. A person who sees a friend modeling the fruit of the Spirit becomes increasingly attracted to the same fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). Fourth, people are most impressed with something when they see it work. Adults who observe a functional Christian family will see that this model works better than all others. They may not know it works because it was ordained to do so, but they will notice that other models do not offer the same resources for optimal family support.

Worship that transforms is the submission of the human story to the creation story, which confronts the cultural story that over time has abducted the self story. A person positioned apart in Christ allows God to immerse him or her into the creation story, where a person becomes aware the truth of things. Here, a

¹⁰³ Ibid.

person will reject the cultural story that society has been selling and embrace the creation story that defines each individual role rightly.

The Purposes of Relationships

Most of the discussion to this point involves the interaction or participation with another person. The dynamic and context of a close spiritual friend provides one of the most important tools with which God carries out His transformational work. God is always the starting point. He is the only true source for any authentic and lasting change in human beings. Therefore, the transformation does not begin here, but often concludes and reveals itself in this context.

The second realm to which this process moves is to the soul of the individual. It is here where the believer communes with truth of scripture and the personhood of the Trinity. The results of this dance with transcendence through the Trinity forms the basis of all spiritual formation. Any resulting change of character toward Christlikeness flows out of this encounter with the eternal other.

Lastly, the context in which the transformation shows up is often in relationships with one's neighbor. The nature of our creator, redeemer, and advocate demonstrates and displays itself as individual believers intentionally practice and apply this divine work in their souls. The church as a whole grows in its internal functionality and external representation of God as each member consistently and deliberately implements this process.

Benner concludes that genuine spiritual friendship allows one to live in the space between ideals and reality.¹⁰⁴ Because of the fall, humans enter life with dysfunctional and relational baggage tied around their necks. They will never match up to the lofty standard set by the Trinity, though they desire to move in that direction. People are plagued as well by examples and models of dysfunctional reinforcement throughout their lives. Nonetheless, they move toward relational healing and redemption by the help of grace and the freedom to fail in spiritual friendships. Jesus' relationships with the disciples, especially Peter, use these ingredients which promote healthy community (Luke 22:33-34).

Lessons on Diversity and Unity from the Trinity

As previously discussed, all true change and spiritual formation begins with God; therefore, the Trinity in relationship to itself must be our starting point. From this divine community the ideals of a spiritual friendship are formed, and it is in the interaction of this divine community that Christ's followers are invited to participate.¹⁰⁵

As much as the Trinity remains a mystery to us on so many levels, we as a church are able to grasp certain lessons pertaining to community life from the Godhead. David Benner states that, "The intimacy that exists between spiritual friends is a togetherness that honors separateness."¹⁰⁶ This is what is seen in the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁰⁵ Benner, 65.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 74.

Trinity. Each individual person of the Trinity brings a nature that perfectly complements the others. The relational dynamic of the divine three is support, respect, and honor of the other parts as well as selflessness, service, mutuality, and priority of the common good. There is freedom and space in their community to be themselves to the fullest measure on the basis of understanding that the outcome of their relationship will allow for the truest form of who they are.

In respect to unity resulting from diversity, the spirit in which participants pursue the common goal matters considerably. The Trinity models this process working perfectly: each person promotes, endorses, and serves the other persons in the purest sense. They are aware of their role as well as the others', and they see the ultimate goal of their actions. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest explain that the Trinity's oneness (unity) is in respect to essence and threeness (diversity) in respect to centers of consciousness, which are capable of fellowship, communication, and intercession with each other.¹⁰⁷ This is a snapshot into the "unity out of diversity" paradigm from a divine perspective.

To begin relating properly to others, a person must first understand his or her true identity. Without this knowledge, there is no foundation upon which to build one's relationship to diversity and unity. Humans must search out the standard by which to formulate and identify these two attributes. With the reality of knowing who they are in Christ as well as an understanding of their talents,

¹⁰⁷ Issler, 40.

gifts, and weaknesses, they are able to move into discovering their role and place in the body of believers.

This personal development promotes a proper understanding of who individuals are in relationship to each other. The relational skills develop as people encounter diversity in outside experiences. They come to appreciate that diversity in the body of Christ and grow in celebration and gratitude as God grows their understanding. The ability to celebrate those who are internally and externally different for the purpose of displaying the fullness of Christ signifies maturity.

Gratitude wells up as individuals understand God as the creator who has ordained diversity for the purpose of discipleship. A person's level of willingness to engage with forms of "other" is an accurate thermometer for his or her openness and receptivity toward the things of God—it reveals the state of the inner posture of the soul. When a man or woman closes doors and entryways to "other," he or she in actuality rejects a part of God and judges him for creating poorly.

Dialogue

David Benner reveals a key ingredient in developing a deeply connected relationship. He terms it dialogue, defined as,

Shared inquiry designed to increase the awareness and understanding of all parties. . . . The intent is exploration, discovery, and insight. . . . In dialogue, I attempt to share how I experience the world and seek to

understand how you do so. In this process each participant touches and is touched by others. The result is each person's being changed.¹⁰⁸

The context is to meet the other individual as a person rather than an object to be studied, used, or monopolized. The motivation is a desire to know through the context of love. Respect, says Benner, is the pre-condition of dialogue, and the necessary perspective is seeing the other person through the eyes of Christ.

A person who wishes to dialogue must open up to risk. Without an individual becoming vulnerable and revealing his or her passions, neither party can experience dialogue. A person must share the deepest longings, fears, and experiences of the soul in order to enter the realm of dialogue.¹⁰⁹

A person beginning and growing in this atmosphere of dialogue soon realizes there are times of encouragement and other times of extreme challenge. These times of encouragement are great, and one must respond with gratitude and a deeper desire to continue in that direction. The result is often a corporate pursuit of the virtuous life. However, in the instances of extreme challenge, the instinct is not to respond in a teachable and humble manner. If transformation is to occur, participants must say in their hearts that they will enter into every conversation and dialogue opportunity they engage in with the possibility of having their viewpoint changed or modified.

¹⁰⁸ Benner, 55.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 57.

Confrontation

Challenging friends and loved ones comes from a base founded upon love and honesty. This practice can often be viewed as scary and frightening, so confronters must implement great sensitivity and care to create an environment where this practice becomes normative. All parties need to feel safe and at ease, so participants must grow trust in order to share the beautiful and ugly areas of life. Benner mentions the importance of friends confronting the illusions in life and being willing to risk temporary discomfort by being called to the truth.¹¹⁰ He explains that the confrontation must be motivated by desire for the other's spiritual well being.¹¹¹

In evangelical circles, confrontation is often viewed as negative and many times perceived as stirring the pot. The tendency to please people is difficult to escape, and the cultural mandate to be politically correct intensifies the trouble. Nonetheless, Christians are faced with Jesus engaging in confrontation throughout his life and on a regular basis (Mark 8:33). One can be encouraged by Jesus' example in living out something contrary to the earthly nature perfectly and consistently. The goal remains for people to commit themselves to creating a culture where confrontation is ordinarily practiced for the sake of the church's health.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Transformation through Dialogue

As true dialogue continues to be practiced, it expands into a greater range of knowing, which grows in depth and intimacy with practice. This evolution of knowing creates a progressively stronger relational structure, which in turn enables a deeper journey toward greater intimacy. At this level of sharing, one person will see the other person's soul revealed in a significant way. Each person involved transforms as their souls are affected reciprocally.

This soul intimacy, Benner notes, is sharing of the whole person, both from the outer life as well as the inner. He states such dialogue uses, "The data of events [which] act as springboards for the sharing of feelings, perceptions, values, ideas and opinions."¹¹² This sharing moves from the external to the internal and the focus progresses from reporting the events themselves to disclosing the heartfelt reflection of such experiences. As deep communication takes place, God's purpose for each encounter with a friend and neighbor becomes more evident.

The Effect of Spiritual Formation on Community

Western society has conditioned individuals, over the years, to focus their attention on the personal and the private aspects of their faith. This bias has developed into a comfortable bed partner with post-modernity. Keeping one's faith in the closet does not rock the boat, so it affects the people one encounters

¹¹² Ibid., 73.

very little, if at all. The practice of this mode of faith prevents the incarnation of the living God to be manifested on earth. As a result, the biblical mandate is not upheld (Matt. 28:19-20).

M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. states, “Social spirituality designates our spiritual pilgrimage within and for the culture we live in.”¹¹³ Biblical spirituality intends to result in the outpouring into culture and society of a truly Christ-infused life. If a person’s spirituality filters into all aspects of his or her life, it cannot help but affect the relationships and environment in which that person lives.

The Location of Community

Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh in their journal article, “Education for Homelessness or Homemaking? The Christian College in a Postmodern Culture,” propose that if the word community is to mean anything, it must refer to a place and its people.¹¹⁴ They explain that people of character are made from local cultures and local responsibilities. The specific issues, situations, community dynamic, and relationships significantly affect who one becomes; therefore, understanding the place’s history, economics, political landscape, spiritual appetite, educational context, and sociological bents is crucial in discovering how the issue of “place” feeds the development of an individual’s

¹¹³ Mulholland, 158-159.

¹¹⁴ Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, “Education for Homelessness or Homemaking? The Christian College in a Postmodern Culture,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 8, no.1 (2004): 63.

character and beliefs. The result becomes like a slow-simmering stew in which all the ingredients of “place” and “people” blend their essence into greater community, producing a dish that reveals the nature of that community.

Cyclical Influences of Community

The community influences the individual and the individual influences the community by a continuing cycle. A very permeable membrane separates these two entities, so if the exchange of content and influence is cut off or flows in only one direction, the individual and the community will suffer. The failure will stifle the opportunity for dialogue, critique, assessment, and opinion. Because of this vital link, an individual will have a lesser link with otherness and therefore a reduction in the situations, circumstances, and relationships that God uses to transform who we are for the better.

This community dynamic illustrates the responsibility for a believer to engage in his or her local culture. Without the church living as a voice and participant in its community, the kingdom will remain hidden for the most part under a bushel. Believers need to know what they believe and act on that belief appropriately for the good of not only themselves, but on-looking neighbors and the community as a whole.

Homelessness and Rootedness

This practice mentioned above possesses greater significance when one considers one’s current cultural landscape. The nature of the global society has made it easy to become disconnected from the local society; a person can either choose to spend time at the coffee shop down the street or talk with distant people

online. It is increasingly easier to live day-to-day without engaging in the local community in a significant way. Bouma-Preiger and Walsh label this disjointed dynamic as homelessness.¹¹⁵ In their article, they reference David Orr who compares people who relate to their world as residents rather than inhabitants. Orr defines residents as individuals who occupy a place in a temporary or rootless way.¹¹⁶ He contrasts the inhabitant who dwells in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place. Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness.^{117 118}

In the discussion of “home” as something to be pursued, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh believe “hospitality” to be a metaphor added to the paradigm that allows home to become all that it is intended to be. They note when a person practices hospitality, that person’s home is not able to evolve into a place of exclusion. One purpose of home is for the other to encounter place, which results in growth, transformation, appreciation, and celebration. Hospitality in this

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ This writer has become convinced that true spiritual formation must incorporate developing a sense of “home” where home is defined as a place where one is able to know and be known in a deep and loving way. It is a place where one’s community knows the person and the possibility of a person disguising that identity in their presence becomes impossible. Such a place fosters accountability, genuine respect, true dialogue, and much otherness for an individual to encounter.

context can be defined as the awareness, intentionality, and vulnerability for one to host others as they experience one's person, beliefs, and world.

For believers, faith forms the essence and shape of home. Through scripture, the person of and one's relationship to Christ become the foundation for home. It becomes a natural response to practice hospitality in community. If one's sense of home is built with Christ and the things of the kingdom, others will encounter His presence through the hospitable model provided.

Effects of Individuals on the Community's Spiritual Life

Mullholland discusses personality types, preferences, tendencies, and their significance in relationship to the spiritual life in his book.¹¹⁹ By using Jung's model of behavioral preferences, Mullholland shows how these direct and influence the spiritual life. He shares numerous examples of one-sided spirituality that, if left alone, will remain deficient and disabled in their growth toward fullness in Christ.¹²⁰ He presents a convincing case for each individual to engage with others who have differing and opposing preferences for the purpose of a balanced and holistic spirituality.¹²¹

He begins by having each individual discover the arena in which he or she feels most comfortable practicing the Christian life. He then takes people to the place where they see the need to engage with their opposite or "other"

¹¹⁹ Mullholland, *Invitation to the Journey*, Chapter 5.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 57-63.

¹²¹ Ibid., 64-73.

preferences. This concept is an applied example of the “encounter with otherness” theme mentioned above. The implication of this activity affects one’s individual and corporate spirituality. One begins to observe transformation on a personal level in one’s inner relationship with Christ, and that change cannot help but transform spiritual ethos.

Effects of Community on an Individual’s Spiritual Life

If a person hopes to gain all that is intended through his or her encounter with “other” preference patterns of doing spirituality, that person must assume an appropriate inner posture. For this to work, he or she needs a great amount of humility, love of diversity, willingness to change, and self assessment. An individual’s sense of the need and priority of such a practice directly correlates to the required character traits and inner posture needed for this to take place.

M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. states, “All of God’s work to conform us to the image of Christ has its sole purpose that we might become what God created us to be in relationship with God and with others” (Mark 12:30-31).¹²² He continues this thought by saying spiritual formation takes place in the context of God, self, and others. He terms these three as the “other” trinity. Mulholland concludes that each relationship with a person’s neighbor has the opportunity to grow that person’s intimacy with God and conversely, any maturity in a person’s relationship with God has a direct effect on that person’s relationships with

¹²² Ibid., 40.

others.¹²³ It is at this point one begins to grasp the significance of the institution of relationships; that is, one comes to understand their role and purpose toward believers becoming complete in Christ.

Klaus Issler affirms Mulholland's point by stating that friendship and relationship with God can only grow to the level of the intimate relationships existing on this earth.¹²⁴ Personal reflection on the issue may prove to be an accurate measuring stick with which to diagnose and prescribe medication in respect to the wellness of the church.

Journaling

Klaus Issler believes that, "A journal is...a catalyst to deepen our normal conversation with God, to nurture over frankness and honesty with him."¹²⁵ If a person's goal is to develop intimate soul discussion with those around him or her, then the person's primary objective should be to grow deeper soul talk with God. This soul talk in the form of journaling is a place for honest reflections of daily experiences. It is a great place for the emotions, intellect, will, and heart to intersect and bleed over to each other in order to create holistic understanding. This arena allows a person to bare his or her soul and let God speak and move as He so chooses.

¹²³ Ibid., 43.

¹²⁴ Issler, 65.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 149.

The issue of recall and memory play a vital role in the practice of journaling. The content one's records serves powerful function, which God uses to jog one's memory of past experience and insight. The psalmists support this practice of reflection (Psalm 77:11-12, 103:2-5). In fact, the book of Psalms itself can be viewed as a collection of inspired journal entries.¹²⁶

Bruce Demarest cites the example of Augustine as one who practiced journaling. His *Confessions* weaves his inner spiritual experience of God into the narrative of his outer journey.¹²⁷ The goal of journaling is captured by Demarest when he says,

Journaling is a contemplative exercise that brings the experience of our inner self into sharper focus. Like the adjustment mechanism of a telescope, a journal sharpens our perspective on the footprints of God in our lives. . . . The journal becomes a permanent record of where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.¹²⁸

Conclusion – Pulling It Together

In an attempt to tie together the numerous aspects of spiritual formation it is necessary to capture the central idea of this process. Klaus Issler points believers in the right direction when he states, “A growing relationship is based

¹²⁶ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 181.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 182.

on continual and mutual self-revelation. . .”¹²⁹ A maturing relationship with God depends upon an individual’s depth of self revelation and the discovery of the person of God. The engagement of the self with incarnational truth through the avenue of personal relationship provides the opportunity for transformation. Most believers are involved in this activity; however, the rate of transformation correlates with the level of self disclosure. Issler affirms this point by saying, “Time and common experiences together will provide the opportunity, but each party must decide whether or not it is worth the effort to bring down the barriers of self hidden-ness.”¹³⁰

He raises the crucial issue of each individual assessing whether this self disclosure is worth the effort. Each person must decide if he or she has an accurate understanding of what the benefits are, understands the vision of victory, or cares enough about the abundant life on which Christ discourses. Part of the reason so many decide not to risk themselves comes from the church’s lack of marketing this beneficent life. One’s motivation and effort are directly connected to a proper vision of what one pursues.

This thesis-project discusses most specifically the lives of emerging adults. The issues and dynamics of the spiritual life covered here are to provide the scaffolding for members of this population to deepen their intimacy with their Savior. The intent is to raise the tough questions and encourage true effort in each

¹²⁹ Issler, 16.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

individual. The areas addressed are not conclusive, but rather reveal a work in progress. They require further investigation and depth of insight pertaining to their role in the spiritual life.

The goal is to bring content and questions to emerging adults that will draw them into contemplation and reflection so they may appropriate true spirituality. As John of the Cross conveys the concept, “What we have joyously harvested with the sickle of contemplation in solitude, we must thresh on the floor of preaching, and so broadcast.”¹³¹ Overall, may emerging adults capture the vision of what remains to be harvested and be therefore motivated with the drive and courage to tread the road toward the abundant life.

The aim of the next chapter is to formulate a structure to begin the process of moving the emergent adult from a distorted spirituality to one of truth, life, and significance. A great need exists to develop a scaffold to serve the content of chapters two (Theological Framework) and three (Spiritual Formation & Socio-Cultural Influences).

¹³¹ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 183.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

From the previous chapters there has been presented a need for emerging adults to evaluate and redirect the specifics that make up their spirituality. From the survey of material in these first three chapters conclusions will be set forth in chapter five. Those conclusions (the shape of the emerging adult soul) will produce a plan of action to realign the soul of the emerging adult. An attempt will be made to provide a new reality from which to work out of and from. Attention is directed toward observing the soul posture emerging adults bring and presenting a more biblical posture for them to adopt. This process utilizes the theological framework from chapter two to provide direction and trajectory for the new posture presented.

Part two of the literature review lays a foundation for methodology and content presented in chapter five. The tools presented to begin the process of transformation flow from the reading and study of the material in chapter three. The conclusions, methodology, and content drawn in chapter five is intended to be formulated into a curriculum. This ultimate goal, to help students in the undergraduate school of Moody Bible Institute to develop a holistic spirituality and the tools to continue developing it in order that they may thrive within the current cultural climate. This goal reaches the application phase thorough a course for undergraduate students at Moody Bible Institute. The course will be

the tangible product used to deliver the ideas and conclusions acquired during this project.

The manner and form this course and curriculum become instituted is of great concern. If the content is delivered in a very propositional way it may lose much of its effectiveness. Referencing Marshall McLuen's adage of "the medium is the message," the potency of the curriculum lies deeply rooted in the style and format it is conveyed. An aim for the individual facilitating the curriculum is to do their best to embody the content in which they are attempting to communicate. This point may appear obvious to those who teach, however, the importance of this point escalates for this specific endeavor because of the nature and content involved in this task.

Goals of the Thesis-Project

As stated at the beginning, the aim of this thesis-project is to develop a curriculum of spiritual formation in order to promote a holistic spirituality that will thrive within the current cultural climate for emerging adults. An infusion of strength and stability is needed to weather the forces upon the young adult's soul. The overarching task fostering the development of this holistic spirituality is the clarification and possibly the discovery of conscious and unconscious values embodied by emerging adults. This values clarification and discovery call for realignment or resetting of the adopted affections held by emerging adult.

The following are a few of the key ingredients found helpful in producing this goal:

- *Evaluating and Assessing:* Through assessing and evaluating the ethic emerging adults are living out
- *Confronting:* By using the Holy Trinity as the content and community to confront the distorted spirituality
- *Turning:* By aiding emerging adults in turning from the old manner of viewing and doing life and adopt the new one made available through their relationship with the Trinity.
- *Adopting:* By identifying and practicing habits which will bring this new spirituality into its fullness

Evaluate and Assess

The process of evaluation and assessment centers on considering the habits and practices showing up in the daily lives of young adults. Observing the lifestyle of this group and comparing it to the life of discipleship Christ calls believers to in the New Testament is the primary task.

Confrontation

The point of confrontation comes, not as judgment cast from one person to another, but from the invading reality of the Holy Other. The perfect style and content (message and medium) of God challenges and over time, if allowed, appropriately deals with a person's issues and crooked posture. The entity that has been chosen to begin and carryout this process is the Holy Trinity. From a confrontation with the Trinity a person becomes exposed to who he or she really is (ultimate reality) in light of a Holy God. This confrontation has the potential to initiate a major paradigm shift. How one understands God, themselves, others,

and the world around them changes dramatically and provides the basis for any transformation which follows.

The magnitude or level of transformation that takes place in a person through this confrontation is directly dependent upon the amount of submission displayed by that individual. God will not impose Himself upon an unwilling heart (Revelation).

Turning

The next action in this process is the act of turning. Turning aligns itself with the idea of repentance. Repentance is an act of stopping movement in a certain direction or trajectory and turning 180 degrees with purpose and intent to proceed in the opposite direction. This notion of turning involves the acquisition of a new reality (perspective on life) and decision to adopt that reality as one's own.

Adoption

Adoption is described as taking ownership of something that was originally foreign and living in such a way that one would never know that fact. There exists a full devotion and self donation of the individual to that which is adopted. This act of giving solidifies the depth of ownership and care provided to the object of adoption.

Desired Long-Term Results

An aspiration of this project is that the church becomes a community confessing a way of life rather than just the acquisition of a passport to another world, and that those who are labeled emerging adults will rise up and display

such a spirituality. Neil Holm elaborates on these intentions we have for emerging adults.

The confessing church, like the conversionist church, seeks to address the problem of sin by calling people to conversion and faith in Christ. But it seeks also to create disciples of Christ who are on a life-long journey as part of God's community in this world. It seeks to train Christians communally to fashion their lives in accordance with what is true, to be a "living, breathing, visible community of faith."¹³²

This description outlines the big picture and addresses the holistic type of spirituality we desire emerging adults to develop. The hope is that the spirituality adopted will be flexible in methodology and form, but stable and orthodox in content. As well, we anticipate that the spirituality practiced will find itself palatable, practical, and trustworthy to those who live it and the community who observe it, discover it as an alternative way of life to be embraced.

Key Discoveries

The key findings from the study can be summarized by the following point.

Emerging Adults have specific issues and worldview which affect greatly the way they live out their spirituality.

- Consumerism
- Individualism

¹³² Neil Holm, "Formation of Resident Aliens: Anabaptist Conversations, Christly Gestures, and Celtic Pilgrimages," *Journal of Christian Education* 46, no.2 (September 2003): 32.

Much of the matter and manner of life with which emerging adults participate does not promote or foster a Christ-honoring spirituality.

Transformation in their spirituality will occur most effectively as they become aware of and choose to assess their affective, theological, relational and epistemological positioning. The researcher believes that these are the key areas needed to be addressed in order to promote significant transformation in the lives of individuals.

A relationship and substantive model outside of themselves and their culture is required to develop a holistic spirituality. This begins and is driven by their relationship and ongoing encounter with God. Emerging adults must come to an awareness and growing need to involve themselves with something (God) outside their culturally given context.

This relationship and substantive model allows them to reposition themselves theologically, relationally, epistemologically, and affectively. This repositioning is gradual and progressive. It may begin very slow or with baby steps. However, any progress should be encouraged and promoted for without such transformation will be minimal. Sensitivity should be used regarding an individual's specific situation and need to process their journey.

The interaction between the beliefs held by emerging adults and their identity becomes a pivotal place for this transformation to occur. The researcher believes that the level of transformation an individual experiences is directly proportional to the amount someone is able to integrate their beliefs with their identity. Without this integration, beliefs remain surface-level ideas that may

easily be replaced by the next innovative notion. Attempt should be made by emerging adults to develop ownership and deep seated convictions of beliefs.

This spirituality is grown best as the individual lives it out in community. This point fosters accountability on a number of levels—theologically, epistemologically, socially, and more. The church was instituted for this purpose and serves Christ in the world best when it lives out its mission as a connected people.

This spirituality is grown best as an individual lives it out in relationships and experiences considered as “other.” God uses relationships to reveal His will and purpose in the lives of His people. His use of this method reveals the danger of isolationism and individualistic tendencies humans possess. Transformation is enhanced as a person becomes increasingly aware and begins to understand this dynamic.

Several creative methods are needed to help them participate in the practices which can bring about spiritual transformation. Attention should be given to the various learning styles individuals have, personality types, personal history, as well as the various ways people deal with trauma and grief.

The Tangible Results

The Curriculum

This study produced was the initial stages of a curriculum. The format for the purpose of this thesis-project is in the form of a single course. The intention is that it would be implemented as an upper level undergraduate course. The title is “Forming the Spirituality of Emerging Adults.” The syllabus and several lesson

plans are included in chapter five. The objectives for students completing the course are:

- Have a general understanding of the spirituality held by emerging adults.
- Begin to understand the forces of influence on the emerging adult soul.
- Acquire skills to assess and evaluate the state of the emerging adult soul.
- Develop a theological understanding of personhood and the practical implications of that in relationships.
- Understand the biblical process of knowing—that is, epistemology.
- Have appreciation toward the diversity of God’s creation and acquire habits to engage with it.
- Acquire a deeper understanding of spiritual friendships and become more skilled at being one.

The Goal

The goal of the course is to make each student aware of the context, content and method options for the formation of their spirituality. First, attention will be given to helping the students discover and assess their current spirituality. Next, the course is designed to confront aspects of their spirituality with biblical spirituality, specifically the Holy Trinity. Time will be spent focusing on each student’s affective, theological, relational, and epistemological perspectives. Using the material compiled in this project, the instructor will try to reset a more biblical perspective and practice of each of these areas in the student’s lives. The instructor and the students will then discuss the connection between personal faith and identity.

The Structure

To bring about this change of perspective, a four-pronged structure is utilized. The four prongs follow:

<i>Four Key Principles</i>	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Luke 19:1-10</i>
Liminal Living	Proximity / placement / positioning	Zacchaeus in the tree
Encountering Otherness	Substance that confronts / challenges	Jesus Christ
Practicing Pilgrimage	Manner / attitude of engagement	Hospitality / welcoming
Expanding the portals	Growth / accessibility process over time	Transformed Life

The structure is intended to apply much of the content for the purpose of resetting the spirituality brought by students.

The Application

The next step is to teach and have students practice various tools to apply this knowledge. The current tools are:

- The new commons
- Discerning voices of influence
- Values clarification
- Stewardship and development of spiritual friendships
- Cycling downward into a more accurate reality
- Questions of cognitive dissonance

- Develop a toggling spirituality

These tools are meant to be habits and practices that can be woven into the student's lives to help promote a fuller and more biblical spirituality. They can be categorized as tools of discernment, enlargement, and positioning. Many of them have more than one of these characteristics. Each one plays a significant role in the process of repositioning of an individual.

External Findings

Based on the research of Todd Hall and his associates at Biola University, profound insights are being discovered pertaining to the area of spiritual formation.¹³³ The realms of attachment theory, infant research, and neuroscience are coming to conclusions which affect the way one views and practices spiritual formation.

First, this research is revealing the depth and significance of man being created as a relational being. Man is placed in community because the fundamental way growth and change occurs is through relationships (John 15). This speaks to the need for spiritual formation to be embodied and not just a bunch of innovative ideas. Hall concludes, "souls naturally desire relational connections, thus we are formed through relationships with God and others."¹³⁴ Emerging adults long to see individuals who can model, demonstrate and pass on a way of life that is culturally relevant and biblically faithful.

¹³³ Todd Hall, "Relational Spirituality" (lecture, CCCU Campus Ministers Conference, San Diego, CA, February 22, 2007).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Second, Hall's research reveals that individuals come to know things on two levels. One level, termed the high road of knowing, is logical, linear, language based, left brain driven, and explicit. The other level is labeled the low road of knowing. This way of knowing works on the gut level, is non-linear, holistic, non-verbal, implicit, and is memory and emotion driven. These two ways of knowing could also be categorized as procedural and experiential. The implication of such a discovery is how does one integrate these two ways of knowing? This point will be discussed further in chapter 5 and 6.

Third, spiritual formation does not occur in a orderly, predictable, and proportional manner. Malcom Gladwell's book Tipping Points illustrates the significance of this issue. Tipping points can be defined as minor shifts in ones perspective and beliefs. Attachment theory shows that relationships are key structural ingredients when a person encounters the tipping points of life. If an individual experiences suffering on some level; it is helpful if significant individuals in that person's life foster a type of detoxification of that suffering and reframe the experience. This reframing brings new meaning and understanding to the suffering encountered.

Conclusion

Ideally, emerging adults will acquire a new vision and passion for their lives because of gaining a more accurate understanding of God, themselves, others, and the world around them. Acquisition will come as the individuals take ownership of this new way of living and being. The hope and intention is that this dynamic will grow as emerging adults progressively attain this new way of living.

The effect of this on a community level, such as a school or church, could potentially be quite significant. This aligns with one of the macro goals the researcher has for the North American church, to promote a healthier church culture for the sake of its mission.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

This chapter summarizes in part 1 the findings acquired through the study of the young adult soul. It should be noted that the majority of sources read and referenced are written from the North American Caucasian viewpoint. This reality limits the ability of these findings to speak to the diversity found in society today. However, the researcher believes there is much insight within these pages that proves to be true in a variety of cultural, ethnic and economic settings.

In part 2, an attempt has been made to develop a curriculum which seeks to address some of the issues presented in part 1. Most of the following description flow out of the reading and literature review conducted by the researcher. Attempt has been made to validate these characteristics and descriptions with personal relationships and experiences the researcher has had with emerging adults.

A Summary of Findings Regarding American Young Adult Learners

Spirituality is the encounter and intersection of who man is in his personhood and who all that God is in His fullness. This spirituality is lived out through a person's affections, desires, temperament, disabilities, abilities, talents, and thought processes. It is the manner in which these details of an individual interact with the things of God (Scripture, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, natural revelation, people, experiences, and circumstances) that determines the vitality and substance of that spirituality. The interaction of humanity with the divine occurs within a specific cultural reality in a specific time in history. It is this

cultural reality which the individual must navigate and deal with as they develop their spirituality.

Emerging Adult Spirituality

An outline of what the spirituality of emerging adults look like will help define the rest of the project. The spirituality can be characterized as possessing belief in God as an overarching being who desires man to be happy and enjoy life. God often plays the role of a handyman who shows up to fix the problem and help life run as it was intended. The goal in life becomes creating a wardrobe of culturally appealing outfits from which to choose. The cultural and human capital spent on image development and maintenance is ever increasing. There is becoming available daily quicker, more expensive and technologically advanced ways in which to participate in this transaction. Power has been abdicated and destructive cultural forces are all too eager to take over to enforce their agenda. The emerging adult for the most part does not comprehend the ramifications of this power heist. The cost upon their soul is huge and often goes unchecked and unnoticed. The purpose of this section is to outline many of the facets of emerging adult spirituality and develop tools to help them cultivate a biblical spirituality amidst life as they experience it.

Common Attributes of the Emerging Adult

Shopping for Identity

Emerging adults today concern themselves with the search for a viable identity, which is the center of their existence and the vehicle through which they experience the world and the world experiences them. The search for a viable

identity may be more accurately described as shopping, for this is often the mindset of one looking to acquire self meaning. The role of consumer is so ingrained in the current culture that it becomes almost impossible for the emerging adult to develop an identity without acting this part.

Fluidity of Core Beliefs

Another concerning quality found in emerging adults is their tendency to live out of a fluid center. Center is defined as the core identity and ethical substance by which all decisions of an individual are made. Today's culture encourages the idea of a fluid center by silently enforcing the idea that to gain acceptance, respect, and esteem, one must lack firm core beliefs. Due to this reality emerging adults sense the need to shift their values, beliefs, and ultimately behavior to align with the specific situation in which they find themselves. As a result, young persons tend to sell themselves into slavery for the perceptions of the outside world. An example of this trend could be an individual submitting a resume to a potential employer with false information. The temptation of attaining the new job outweighs the need to honestly reveal one's true person.

Basil Mitchell, a Philosophy of Religion professor at Oxford University, comments on this dynamic: "...many ordinary people, particularly young people, [are] quite happy to adopt a pragmatic, utilitarian attitude to society at large, and to meet the crises of personal life with odd and often inconsistent scraps of "philosophy" picked up from anywhere and claiming no universal truth or even

relevance...”¹³⁵ The problem this leaves is the dilemma of bringing together the external and internal, or public and private, worlds.

The pull of image management and development plays heavily into an emerging adult’s spirituality. The moral order of the day gives the power to “the way the world sees [a person]” rather than the reality God has determined. Tom Beaudoin asserts that the items with which emerging adults surround themselves transmit messages to the world. The items have no intrinsic value; rather, their extrinsic value makes them either worthwhile or worthless. Much of the effort people put into image management focuses on the message being projected to others. Thus, the crucial factor for many emerging adults becomes the need to attain and discern this perception, and this usually comes with a sacrifice to solid core beliefs.

Disembodiment through Image

Philosopher and physician Drew Leder argues that “It is precisely visual experience that lends itself most to an experience of disembodiment.” Seeing typically displaces a person from the world and makes him or her able to evaluate it from a removed viewpoint. This is very different from the experience of touch, for example, which usually increases awareness of personal involvement. Sight is also the one sense that allows us to engage the world from afar. A person needn’t

¹³⁵ Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: weaving together belief & behavior during the university years* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

become involved in the world to see it. In other words, an intensely visual culture fosters the (mis)conception that we are disembodied people.¹³⁶

Tom Beaudoin suggests that rather than remove themselves from the world, humans should acquire a “toggling spirituality.” By this he means people should move back and forth regularly between the active and the contemplative life—the physical involvement and the observational disembodiment of life. Jesus Christ set this precedent during his time on Earth (John 6:15-24). He frequently spoke to large crowds, and then stole away to quiet and lonely areas to be alone with God and with his thoughts. This, then, is the example God would have humankind follow.

Individualistic Attitudes

The focus on certain constitutional rights, such as abortion and gay rights, over the past forty years has promoted the emerging adult’s sense of individualism. Merv Mercer of Wycliffe College confirms this opinion: “...students have grown up and been formed by a climate [in] which individual rights were being defined with a consequent diminishment of conversation about the importance of shared, responsible community life.”¹³⁷ There are several consequences of this shaping process. First, it feeds the notion that the primary agenda in life is to promote and protect self. Second, it strengthens emerging

¹³⁶ Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating who we are with what we buy* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 100-101.

¹³⁷ Merv Mercer, “Formational Initiatives at Wycliffe College,” *Theological Education* 39, no.2 (2003): 54.

adults' consumer mindset. The manner in which one lobbies congress for abortion rights is very similar to the way one negotiates when purchasing a new car. It becomes difficult to dissociate from one realm to another. Third, it implies that emerging adults have built up immunity to formational processes. It now takes more flash, glamour, and noise to capture the attention of an individual's heart, mind, and soul. This consequence has significant ramifications for the way higher education and spiritual formation is carried out today.

In regards to the emerging adult's religious involvement, the theme of individualism remains a top priority. Arnett and Jensen reveal that "... [emerging adults'] beliefs are best observed not through regular participation in a religious institution with other, like-minded believers, but by themselves, in the privacy of their own hearts and minds, in a congregation of one."¹³⁸

Overly Optimistic View of the Future

Most emerging adults believe they can accomplish anything they put their minds to in life. This in large part is due to their parents, teachers, and mentors imbuing them with such a mantra throughout their developmental and adolescent years. The notion that each person is the best, or above average at very least, has been instilled from childhood on. Part of the motivation of such practices is to instill self confidence and self worth. However, any real assessment of person, ability, and skill falls to the wayside with such a tactic. One may maintain or

¹³⁸ Arnett, Jeffery Jensen and Lene Arnett Jensen, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 17, no.5 (September 2002): 465.

even grow in confidence and self worth, but that in which one becomes confident does not exist. A person who undergoes this indoctrination often continues on until reality comes crashing in. When this occurs, the change affects the man or woman on a grand scale. Oftentimes, reality may hit on the job, in ministry, in marriage, or in parenthood. It would serve emerging adults well if they are able to acquire an accurate assessment of themselves early on in order to prevent such occurrences.

The Deferred Adulthood

Emerging adults desire to avoid responsibilities common to their stage of life. For example, marriage, parenthood, and careers are often delayed for several years. Several factors contribute to this trend. First, the age range for adolescence is expanding. Traditionally, an adolescent was considered to be between the ages of thirteen to eighteen years old. Today, that range has grown to include youth as young as ten and as old as twenty-five. Additionally, many more experiences avail themselves to adults in this stage of life—especially as the number of young adults in possession of greater resources continues to grow. Finally, most emerging adults do not encounter the necessity to involve themselves with these traditional markers of adulthood; greater freedom delays these experiences. This is unfortunate because experiences of this nature bring with them increased responsibility. Arnett and Jensen affirm this trend, noting that emerging adults depart from religious participation during this period of their

lives and reinstitute this practice once they enter the adult roles of marriage and parenthood.¹³⁹

Desensitization

The nature of society today has desensitized its people to violence and heartache. The media revolution existing today, declares Neil Postman, has caused individuals to attain a “Low Information-Action Ratio.” Television presents viewers with information upon which they cannot act; individuals become trained to receive and discard data without taking action.¹⁴⁰

The image impotence emerging adults experience is accurately described in the book *The Challenge of Postmodernism*. David Dockery notes, “Repeatedly subjected to TV’s small jolts, we become incapable of outright shock or intense arousal, lapsing into a constant, dull anxiety wherein we can hardly sense the difference between a famine and a case of body odor.”¹⁴¹ As a result of this fact, the shock value of the various media sources keeps escalating to meet the need perceived in our anesthetized society.

Consumeristic Natures

The search for power and privilege among emerging adults reveals itself in their consumerist attitudes toward higher education. Edward Long, Jr. shares

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 83.

¹⁴¹ David S. Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 319.

numerous stories in his book *Higher Education as a Moral Enterprise* regarding the mindset held by emerging adults as they pursue their education. One such story comes from his investigation in Duke's School of Business. Long asked the students, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The response follows:

With few exceptions, they wanted three things – money, power and things (very big things, including vacation homes, expensive automobiles, yachts and even airplanes.) Primarily concerned with their careers and the growth of their financial portfolios, their personal plans contained little room for family, intellectual development, spiritual growth or social responsibility. Their mandate to the faculty was, 'Teach me how to be a moneymaking machine. Give me only the facts, tools and techniques required to ensure my instantaneous financial success.' All else was irrelevant.¹⁴²

This attitude is not specific to business schools around the country; it exists in the hearts and minds of many emerging adults in most westernized societies. The manner in which it presents itself comes in many different colors and images; however, the inner posture that drives these images remains the same. Whether the item sought after is a vacation home or successful ministry, both have the potential to be pursued by distorted means.

The Components of Emerging Adult Spirituality

Affective Positioning

Man cannot escape the reality that he exists as a cultural and emotional being as well as a spiritual being. Within this ordained human construct God calls man to glorify and commune with Him. The tension exists as a person attempts to carry out this goal amid the cultural atmosphere and human form one is given. A

¹⁴² William H. Willimon and Thomas H. Naylor, *The Abandoned Generation: Rethinking Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 38-39.

key aim of this study is to promote and equip emerging adults to live out the glorification and communion of their relationship with their Creator in the context of their current cultural situation. Part of the process for attaining this goal is to determine the factors hindering or promoting maturity in the life of the emerging adult.

One of the most revealing discoveries in the journey inside the emerging adult's soul is the content to which they subject and submit their affections. This will provide insight as to what items and experiences emerging adults find appealing and appetizing. The next step is to help them reposition and realign their affections in a way that fosters greater spiritual growth and intimacy.

This journey inside the soul of the emerging adult tends to be a complex and difficult road. Amy Plantinga Pauw declares, “. . . attitudes and emotions exert enormous resistance against our best efforts at integrity between beliefs and practices.”¹⁴³

Two of the most overwhelming themes that possess power in the emerging adult's life are consumerism and individualism. These two items can be observed through the discussion of the traits of emerging adults listed previously. There are numerous ways these two themes surface as emerging adults live out their spirituality.

One example that reveals the impressionable nature of the emerging adult soul is a group interview conducted by Richard T. Sweeney, university librarian at

¹⁴³ Miroslav Volf and Dorthy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 47.

the New Jersey Institute of Technology. The students he interviewed were from Nevada State College and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. Sweeney shares:

They rarely read newspapers—or, for that matter, books. They are impatient and goal oriented. They hate busy work, learn by doing, and are used to instant feedback. They want it now. They think it's cool to be smart. They have friends from different ethnic backgrounds. They want flexibility – in the classroom and in their lives.¹⁴⁴

Some of the traits on this list are encouraging and some are discouraging. The consumer mindset shows in their sense of impatience, dislike of busy work, expectation of instantaneous feedback, prioritization of coolness, and desire for flexibility. These items shape the future of higher education, but on a grander scale they impose themselves upon the lives and souls of emerging adults.

The hints of individualism present in this quote by Sweeney are seen, first, in the attitude of impatience which sends the message that life is all about me. Second, the desire for flexibility reveals their inflexibility to live in any way they don't choose.

If this is the image showing up in the education realm, the image in the Church will certainly shift as these traits of emerging adults play themselves out. Many of the expectations present in the classroom and students relationship to professors are very similar to the parishioner's relationship to the pastor. Just as these traits held by students shape the way higher education will be done in the

¹⁴⁴ Richard T. Sweeney, "How the New Generation of Well-Wired Multitaskers Is Changing Campus Culture," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 January 2007, sec. B, p. 10-15.

future, the traits held by the parishioners shape the way church will be done in the future.

As one surveys the various churches currently existing in North America, one can observe the churches who are changing according to the attitudes held by parishioners and the churches who are resistant. The question that follows is: what change is God honoring, and conversely, what change is feeding and promoting parishioners' consumerist and individualistic tendencies? If it is the Christian church that is responsible for shaping and addressing the spirituality held by emerging adults, then it must take responsibility for discerning and determining what influences what it is, what it does, and where it is going.

The characteristics held by most emerging adults today become even more volatile as they become paired with the exploding world of technology. This field is growing at an exponential rate as daily new forms of technology become available. The change brought about by this coupling comes quicker and is substantially greater than ever before.

Theological Positioning

The theological positioning that most emerging adults bring is culturally based and self driven. The structure being used to make sense of God, self, and world is a hedonistic, individualistic, therapeutic, image-addicted self. How one defines God stems from selfish desire as Truth becomes the flavor of the day. It changes from moment to moment determined by need and context. The individual is left to fill that God shaped hole with anything that tugs on their heart or stimulates their emotions.

Vinoth Ramachandra believes individuals are seeking to attain security and well-being for themselves and their group.¹⁴⁵ David Wells provides a fine analysis of the present state of theology:

Once [confession] has lost its discipline in the Word of God, it finds its subject matter anywhere along a line that runs from Eastern Spirituality to radical politics to feminist ideology to environmental concerns. . . . The Christian Faith has become privatized and at a single stroke confession is eviscerated and reflection reduced mainly to thought about one's self.¹⁴⁶

From this vantage point, emerging adults seem to be using the vehicle handed to them by society well. This is to be expected from person who is purchasing theological structure from the current culture.

The concept of sin is one that has been put through the postmodern machine. It ceases to mean what it once did. Sin has become defined as a person's shortcomings in relation to those around them. For example, someone won't be considered a sinner if someone in a worse state exists nearby. The reality of sin being man's condition relative to a Holy God is nowhere to be found in the current culture. Gerald Vann asserts, "Only a fool could deny the fact of sin, though we may choose to call it by another name."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Vinoth Ramachandra, *God's That Fail: Modern Idolatry & Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 41-42.

¹⁴⁶ David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 101.

¹⁴⁷ David P. Gushee, *Only Human: Christian Reflections on the Journey Toward Wholeness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 83.

Epistemological Positioning

A vital component in the assessment and realignment of emerging adults' spirituality is their epistemology. The way in which people come to hold knowledge is of utmost importance because it greatly affects the way they place themselves in relation to God, self, and world.

The struggle for power is one of the key things that destroy virtuous knowing. If selfish gain of power is the goal of knowledge, true knowing cannot result. Often the postures people assume today as they engage in the process of knowing are postures of exploitation and scheming. Examples of this can be observed in the fields of business, dating relationships, and elder board decisions. Again as one focuses on the priorities held by society today, such as wealth, power, and notoriety, one senses the need to participate in the process of knowing in this manner. As one remains in this closed system set forth by society driven by self, perceived needs, power, and control one will likely miss much of the blessing God has made available.

Adam and Eve's desire to know stemmed from curiosity, control, and desire to have attributes belonging to God alone, rather than love. This parallels the epistemological perspective held by most emerging adults today. Often their goal for knowledge is for the purpose to acquire position, status, material goods, sex, or some other self driven desire. This approach to knowing fits well with the existing climate of consumerism and individualism. Knowledge has become a commodity to be bought or sold and negotiated upon for the cheapest price.

Working out of this epistemological model not only distorts the method of knowing, but also disrespects and dishonors the thing to be known. What are the results of this way of knowing? God, His people, and His world are all perceived in a false reality.

Realignment

Affective Repositioning

God is intensely concerned with the repositioning of man's affective nature. Without directing their affections toward the eternal and transcendent God, humans will continue to wallow in the slop peddled by the world. One of the clearest examples of humanity dealing with repositioning the affections is in the Psalms, which pull back the curtain covering the human soul. The heartfelt emotions and passions of life situations are poured out before God honestly and authentically. In this pouring out, God meets man in his various situations and deals with him according to His nature. It is in this process that the affections begin to be reset and attach themselves in new ways. New connections are made to God's promises, person, and perspective. This realignment provides the hope and potential for a soul to journey toward the life of abundance that Christ talks about.

After the investigation of influences on our thinking and behavior of consumerism there is a hope for greater freedom from these cultural forces. Beaudoin concludes, "And so our brand economy discloses a task for spiritual

maturity: knowing and being known by ourselves and others, without being governed by entitlement regarding who we are or what we buy.”¹⁴⁸

Baby boomers brought the idea or concept of individualism into critical mass. This was the backbone of much transition and revolution in the sixties. Today, the emerging adult generation has taken individualism to new heights and level of intensity. The rise of the self above all competitors is the mantra of the day.

The solution, contrary to what much of North American evangelicalism has done, is not to destroy the self and abolish it from our radar. The polished, thin veneer and appetizing, taste-enhancing trinkets surrounding it must be removed. The self, which God has ordained, created, and loved, has to be assessed and laid bare to scripture and the Spirit to begin to take the soul of the self down the path of transformation.

One of the realities of emerging adult spirituality is the release of a coherent faith at the onset of emerging adulthood and re-adoption of that faith near the end of emerging adulthood. If this is the case, effort must be made to help emerging adults see the need, relevancy and significance of their faith through this period.

The realization and conviction of an emerging adult coming to comprehend their desperate need for a coherent faith is most significantly fostered by the exposure of who they really are by a holy, loving, and forgiving God.

¹⁴⁸ Tom Beaudoin, *Consuming Faith: Integrating who we are with what we buy* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2003), 106.

Theological Repositioning

In order to confront the consumerist and individualist tendencies of emerging adults, attention must be paid to the transcendent. God, existing as the Holy Trinity, is the transcendent being that can adequately deal with any malady humanity possesses. As previously discussed, the Trinity exists as the template for man to gain perspective of who he is and how he is to live. Attention is given to the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity to provide direction and remedy for man's plight of self-glorification.

The transformational discovery emerging adults are able to acquire from attending to the Trinity is coming to understand true personhood. The reality of the Trinity proclaims that man's identity and personhood is founded primarily upon a relationship with God himself and secondarily from the relationships He has chosen with others. A person comes to know him or herself truly by seeing the reflection in the face of God. God gives shape to man's personhood as he appropriates the many promises, covenants, and blessings found in scripture. Personhood becomes further developed as one encounters relationships with individuals who tell the truth. As people lovingly relate to each other and voice that which God has already stated regarding humanity in scripture, true personhood grows.

This newly acquired reality allows emerging adults to release the desire and compulsion to be defined through society's opinions. The opportunity presents itself where one can cease being a slave by acquiring acceptance, respect, and admiration through inauthentic means. The emerging adult should be

encouraged to relocate the power of identification from the self to a relationship with the Trinity and a relationship with others. Instead of being a slave to others opinions, emerging adults are to take the fact that they are created in the image of God and develop their personhood out of healthy interaction with the Trinity and with those God has placed around them.

Two concepts add color and context to this repositioning of the emerging adult soul. First, a person must reflect upon the cross of Jesus Christ discover the need to pick it up and walk with it. Adopting this soul posture promotes proper dealing with many of the habits developed by emerging adults. People who align themselves with Christ in His death and resurrection provide the substance needed to battle the inborn self-indulgent, hedonistic stature. Second, grace must enter the situation in order to infuse the soul with hope and perseverance for the journey. The reality of this process brings failure, stumbling, and disappointment. Grace creates the atmosphere required to deal with these factors. Sharon Parks mentions that within emerging adults is a combination of promise and vulnerability.¹⁴⁹ Grace makes room for this vulnerability that is very much a daily reality in this phase of life.

Relational Repositioning

Why does a person experience overwhelming grief and sadness when loved one dies? This is absurdly obvious on one level and yet it provides insight

¹⁴⁹ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

into the great gift God has given man in relationships. David Gushee notes, “The extraordinary importance of our relationships is never more obvious than when they are disrupted.”¹⁵⁰ This statement causes one to ponder the significance of relationships and their divinely ordained purpose. The reality of a friend’s death makes one aware of the great significance that individual played in one’s life. This is a great blessing one may become aware of in the face of death amidst all the grief, pain, and sadness that encompasses a soul at such a time. Gushee illustrates the point through events in recent history.

. . . the many great evils that human beings have done to each other in recent decades, like the Holocaust and Stalin’s prison camps, have caused our most sensitive thinkers to notice once again how bound we are to each other, how much we need each other, how vulnerable we are to each other, and how disastrous it is when we forget these connections, needs, and vulnerabilities.¹⁵¹

An important part of relational repositioning the emerging adult is learning the role relationships play in this formational process. We literally do not know who we are apart from our relationships with others. And throughout life, the self is arduously formed (and to some extent always being formed), gaining coherence, stability, and permanence of identity through its engagements with other people...The different community contexts that have shaped us provide a road map by which we can locate ourselves coherently and cohesively.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Gushee, 64.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵² Ibid., 64.

Gushee places the flesh of human relationships on the skeleton of the Trinity. The search for true personhood is discovered as one positions oneself in this manner. An understanding of God's reality becomes further developed as one practices this format of living consistently.

The journey into self discovery can be frightening and unsettling, but the cost of not pursuing this goal is high. The ability to self donate brings freedom enabling Christ's ministry of the gospel to take flight. Reinhard Hutter describes the ramifications of self deception: ". . . one whose self cannot accept the truth about herself has no way to share herself with others, no way to give himself away in genuine personhood; in short, no way to practice hospitality in any authentic sense."¹⁵³ The hospitality referred to in this statement entails the truth possessed by God and the gift of relationship with others. This proves to be the biblical model for a person to acquire an accurate understanding of him or herself, God, and others.

Epistemological Repositioning

Another area of the emerging adult's formational process is the way a person engages in the job of knowing. This task determines the way one comes to understand God, self, and world. Thus, the manner in which one participates in the knowing process determines how accurately a person perceives reality.

As mentioned earlier, emerging adults have grown up with cultural forces that have shaped their process of knowing. This culturally adopted way of

¹⁵³ Volf, 215.

knowing can be characterized as knowing for the purposes of power, control, and manipulation. As an individual focuses on and communes with God, he or she finds an alternative way of knowing. God's way of knowing can be characterized by love, truth, justice, and selflessness. Evidence of this is visible through His dealing with His people and creation throughout history. God ever lives out of His nature as divine gentleman. His knowing displays respect, honor, and concern for man's well-being.

Parker Palmer helps heighten understanding regarding God's way of knowing. The title of his book *To Know as We Are Known* clearly communicates the truth that must be adopted.

To know truth is to become betrothed, to engage the known with one's whole self, an engagement one enters with attentiveness, care, and good will. To know in truth is to allow one's self to be known as well, to be vulnerable to the challenges and changes any true relationship begins. To know in truth is to enter into the life of that which we know and to allow it to enter into ours... truth involves entering a relationship with someone genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately found.¹⁵⁴

Adopting this new way of knowing is a key ingredient to the whole formational process. Without attending to many of the traits listed by Palmer as one engages in knowing, the opportunity for transformation shrinks or dissolves. Several of the components discussed in the study surface here in the development of a redeemed practice of knowing. Palmer notes the need "to engage the known with one's whole self," but this act is impossible if one does not really know oneself. Additionally, he mentions the requirement to be open and vulnerable.

¹⁵⁴ Palmer, 31.

This dynamic is affirmed and promoted through the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity and man being created in God's image. The facts that God donates of Himself and desires to have a relationship with man speak loudly to man's responsibility to enter into relationship with others.

Methods to Promote Repositioning

The potential for positive transformation within colleges and universities in the next decade is truly amazing...but that possibility, comes a great obligation: to deliver higher education in a way that not only meets the demands of this new generation of students, but one that understands how the resources, delivery methods, mission and spiritual development need to come together in new ways.¹⁵⁵

Liminal Living

Liminal living is defined as the intentionality of an individual to place himself or herself in close proximity to that which is considered "other." The probability of a person encountering this other is directly associated to where that individual places him or herself. If someone is situated close to this other, the possibility of the encounter increases. If someone is situated far way from the other, the possibility of the encounter decreases. For example, if someone wants to invest in the lives of today's youth but they live in a retirement community where no one is under the age of sixty-five, the probability of them achieving

¹⁵⁵ Todd S. Voss, Book review of Serving the Millennial Generation by M.D. Coomes and R. DeBard, *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*, no.5, (Spring 2005): 83.

their goal is very slim. However, if they volunteer at their church's youth group every Wednesday night, then the probability is extremely high.

This concept of living liminally can be carried out on a number of levels. First, and most importantly it can be done between God and man. How man situates himself before God matters immensely. Zacchaeus the tax collector and his encounter with Jesus is one example on this level. Zacchaeus climbs a tree due to his short stature in order to get a glimpse of the Christ (Luke 19:1-10). Second, liminal living can be conducted in relation to one's internal and external worlds. An example of this level can be seen as one attempts to reconcile what one believes in regards to forgiveness and how that person practices that truth in their relationships. Third, this concept can be implemented between two individuals or groups of people. Worlds can be and are enlarged as one encounters the life of another.

The result of liminal living not only changes individuals and communities, but cultures as well. As people develop this concept as a habit and way of life, change will occur at a quicker rate.

The Method for Encountering Otherness

Other could be the divine Other who is God, other could be my wife who is of a different gender and temperament, other could be my neighbor who is of a different race and ethnic background, and other can be my grandfather who is in a different stage of life and generation. Other could also be an experience. It can be a mission trip to a developing country. It can be a new job, church, or community. It can be the entering into marriage, the birth of a new baby, or the

death of a parent. In essence, other includes values, patterns, products, life views, or experiences.

Thus, the question remains: why should someone encounter other? One reason is that it provides opportunity to deal with one's preconceptions. It affirms the fact that encountering diversity is a necessary ingredient to learning and growth. It allows one's world to expand and grow in appreciation for the fullness of God's creation.

Constructive, transforming encounters with otherness and true exchange of ideas facilitated in mentoring communities, where hospitality to otherness is prized and practiced(. . .) across any significant divide set at the soul's core an experience of knowing that every assumption may be potentially transformed by an encounter with otherness.¹⁵⁶

Practicing Pilgrimage

The model peddled by North American culture regarding one's engagement with life can be characterized as tourism. Tourists travel for pleasure and fulfillment of selfish desires. They play the role of a removed spectator, staying aloof from any encounter that may require self disclosure or change. Tourists remain unaffected by the encounter because they keep distance between themselves and the culture or context they are observing. Once the tourist returns from an encounter life goes on as usual without any change, thought, or reflection.

¹⁵⁶ Daloz Parks, 141.

Pilgrimage is a journey driven by a transcendent purpose. A pilgrim does not sit on the sidelines and watch from afar, but participates with and engages that which they confront, whether it be good or bad. Pilgrims leave home with a true and growing understanding of who they are, and this directly corresponds to what they are called to do. Their identity and calling are profoundly affected and enhanced by what they encounter on the pilgrimage. Due to the nature of participating in pilgrimage it often is painful and emotional as the core of the individual's being is touched. Pilgrimage is closely associated to the life of discipleship to which God calls His people (Luke 14:25-33).

Expanding the Portals

Something encouraging occurs as one participates in these disciplines as a way of life. A metaphor to describe this dynamic can be termed the expansion of portals. Each time emerging adults cross the threshold, the portal becomes stretched permanently. This expansion of portals makes the possibility of such encounters more available and accessible.

Structures to Promote Repositioning

The New Commons

The new commons is a metaphor for a place where emerging adults are able to participate in community with all that they are. Sharon Parks defines it as, “. . . an embodied image and practice that nourishes an imagination of the possibility of shared participation in creating the common good.”¹⁵⁷ It is a place

¹⁵⁷ Daloz Parks, 157.

where emerging adults can ask questions, enjoy camaraderie, or simply interact with others. It is a place where they can try on new ideas as garments.¹⁵⁸

The new commons exists to allow individuals to wrestle through life's issues with one another. It acts as a laboratory in which to develop, challenge, and forge new ideas. Philosophical debates are no longer confined to classrooms, but rather young adults discuss topics ranging from theology to entertainment in places as diverse as dormitory lounges, coffee shops, chat rooms, and Myspace. What the new commons promotes and creates is dependent upon the contribution (or lack thereof) of each member in the new community. This fact should be communicated to emerging adults for them to realize the responsibility and stewardship waiting before them.

Voices of Influence

Danny Holland created a structure to outline what influences emerging adults. He uses the following steps to determine this. First, he points out that whatever has our attention will shape us. Our attention determines our direction of travel, and it is solely our own investment. This is important because what has our attention attracts our energy, and the time and energy we devote to something directly corresponds to the strength we have on that issue. If we spend time on the correct areas of our lives, we will be able to recognize and promote allies as

¹⁵⁸ Gary Parrett, "Ministry Strategies for Postmodern Generations" (lecture, DMin. Residency, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, south Hamilton, MA, January 20, 2005).

well as recognize and deter enemies.¹⁵⁹ With this knowledge, emerging adults should be able to focus their attention on spiritual matters of importance so as to grow strong in those regards.

Values Clarification

In order to know which spiritual matters deserve such attention, emerging adults must acquire the ability to discern and assess the values that they hold. Arthur Holmes presents a workable structure to achieve this goal. After reflection, a person chooses from among available alternatives. This reflection ought to be focused on hearing and responding to the Word of God. The choice a person makes in this arena determines what he or she has come to prize and cherish. This will result in the person publicly affirming the newly cherished ideal and adopting a repeated behavior pattern with which to express this adoration.

Holmes' intent is that this structure would be applied to the emerging adult's discernment of values within the current culture. One of the benefits of using Holmes' values clarification structure is that emerging adults can begin to see, evaluate, and question the patterns and habits they have developed.

Stewardship and Development of Spiritual Friendships

Even with the great multitude of technological advances, emerging adults struggle with the ability to relate in a meaningful way. The methods and speed of

¹⁵⁹ Danny Holland, *Reaching Teens in Their Natural Habitat* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2006), 21-31.

communication have sky rocketed; however, the insight, depth, and intimacy of that communication have decreased.¹⁶⁰

A survey given to college students revealed that the primary relational influence upon their growth was their peers.¹⁶¹ Emerging adults prove to be the most influential voice shaping each other's worldview. Thus, the question surfaces: how are connections fostered to enhance relationships given the technological climate? Relationships, specifically friendships, are created and nurtured as individuals exist in close proximity to one another. Thus, the technology available today should be used to connect and enhance these pre-existing relationships in a deeper way.

David Benner states that, "The intimacy that exists between spiritual friends is a togetherness that honors separateness."¹⁶² This is what we see in the Trinity. Each individual person of the Trinity brings a nature that perfectly complements the others. The relational dynamic of the divine three is support, respect, honor, selflessness, service, mutuality, and priority of the common good. There is freedom and space in their community to be to the fullest extent all they are, knowing that the outcome of their relationship will allow for the truest form of who they are. "To cling to self is death. But to give away self is life. For

¹⁶⁰ Richard Lamb, *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 13.

¹⁶¹ Kirk Baker, "Understanding the influences that shape the lives of Bible College students" (first project in the DMin. Program, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, August 31, 2003).

¹⁶² Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 74.

when self flies to and fro among human beings even the great master himself leads the revelry, giving himself eternally to his creatures and back to himself in the sacrifice of the Word.”¹⁶³

From Common Conversation to Dialogue

David Benner reveals a key ingredient in developing a deeply connected relationship. He labels it dialogue; which he defines as, “Shared inquiry designed to increase the awareness and understanding of all parties (. . .) the intent is exploration, discovery, and insight.” He continues, “In dialogue, I attempt to share how I experience the world and seek to understand how you do so. In this process each participant touches and is touched by others. The result is each person’s being changed.”¹⁶⁴ The context is to meet the other individual as a person rather than an object to be studied, used, or monopolized. The motivation is a desire to know through the context of love. Respect, says Benner, is the precondition of dialogue. Seeing the other person through the eyes of Christ is the needed perspective. Risk is required if dialogue is to be pursued. A person’s deepest longings, fears, and experiences must be shared if they desire to enter the realm of dialogue.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ C.S.Lewis, *The problem of Pain*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 153.

¹⁶⁴ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 55.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

Humility and Teachability Quotient

As one begins and grows in this atmosphere of dialogue, one realizes dialogue will at times encourage and other times challenge the individual. These times of encouragement are great, and they must respond with gratitude and a deeper desire to continue in that direction; this often results in a corporate pursuit of the virtuous life. However, people may not respond in a teachable and humble manner when their thought processes or behaviors are challenged. If they are to be transformed in the most significant way possible, their hearts must say, “Every conversation and dialogue opportunity I engage in, I must enter into it with the possibility of having my point of view changed or modified.”

The Concept in Practice

This soul intimacy, Benner notes, is sharing of the whole person, both from the outer life as well as the inner. He states such dialogue uses, “The data of events acts as springboards for the sharing of feelings, perceptions, values, ideas and opinions.”¹⁶⁶ This sharing moves from the external to the internal. The focus progresses from reporting the events themselves to disclosing your heart felt reflection of such experiences. The goal is to become aware of God’s purpose for each encounter with our neighbor.

Confrontation

A person cannot challenge friends and loved ones unless the confrontation is founded upon love and honesty. This practice can often be viewed as scary and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 73.

frightening, and a person must use great sensitivity and care to create an environment where this practice becomes normative. All parties must safe in order to share the beautiful and ugly areas of life. Benner notes the importance of friends both in confronting the illusions in life and being willing to risk temporary discomfort with the truth. He explains that the confrontation must be motivated by desire for the other's spiritual well being.¹⁶⁷

True dialogue, as it continues to be practiced, functions in a way that it expands into a greater range of knowing. The knowing of the other party involved grows in depth and intimacy. This evolution of knowing creates a progressively stronger relational structure, in which to journey further toward greater intimacy. At this level of sharing, one begins to observe the other party's soul in a significant way. The result is usually ones soul being affected for the better in an intense way. Change is then able to take place at a much quicker rate.

Hermeneutical Spiral

A tool available to emerging adults for navigating their way through the cultural milieu is one acquired from the field of hermeneutics and exegesis. Grant Osborn terms this process the hermeneutical spiral. A primary goal for an individual attempting to interpret scripture is to discover the presuppositions the interpreter brings to the text. How aware is the individual of the bias they possess and to what extent are these imposed on the text they are attempting to interpret? Each successive time the individual comes to the text they gain insight and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

awareness into their personal bias. If this is the case they can deal with their bias accordingly and thus acquire a more objective interpretation.

Similarly, as emerging adults attempt to evaluate and interpret their culture and who they are in it, how mindful are they of the baggage they bring? What presuppositions are they imposing on the situations they find themselves in? They must become aware of these things in order to navigate that which life brings. If they evaluate these aspects of their lives, they can move toward acquiring a more accurate and realistic understanding of that in which they are involved.

One option would be for an emerging adult to seek out an older friend to act as a mentor. Not only will this mentor be able to provide an outside perspective, but he or she can probably give advice from personal experience.

This practice makes a strong case of why individuals need to make a habit of “encountering other.” Emerging adults can be proactive in constructing structure in their lives that foster practices such as this. Having an already existing relationship with a person of an older generation creates a vital link in dealing with issues such as this one.

Posing Questions That Cause Cognitive Dissonance

Another useful way to promote the integration of the internal and external worlds of emerging adults is to ask questions of great significance and complexity. These may be the big ethical questions of the day or may even be questions no one has thought of yet. The questions may pertain to topics such as HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, extreme poverty, war and terrorism, or genocide.

The intent is to use questions that penetrate the heart and mind. The person being posed the question should be forced to look at it from a number of angles and perspectives. The best questions are those that will not let the individual walk away from the issue. It should nag and haunt them forcing them to seek an answer and come to terms with it at least on some level.

These types of questions are intended to force emerging adults to use their faith and learn how it weathers the tough issues confronting humanity. It pushes their beliefs and theology into the public domain. It should help individuals answer the question: what purposes do my theology and beliefs serve? What difference do they make? This tool has the potential to help solidify someone's calling and purpose in life.

Integration of High Road and Low Road Knowing

As introduced in chapter four, the integration of the high road and low road of knowing are crucial to the development of a holistic and durable spirituality. As a review, the high road of knowing is logical, linear, language based, left brain driven, and explicit. The low road of knowing works on the gut level, is non-linear, holistic, non-verbal, implicit, and is memory and emotion driven. The question must be asked, how does one integrate these two levels of knowing? The integration can occur in two directions. Either one begins on the high road (head knowledge) and drills down into the lower road by finding life experiences useful for processing high road content, or starts on the low road of unthought knowns and moves upward toward the high road by translating and connecting one's experiences into words through narrative and journaling. An

example of this process could be watching a movie and connecting theological themes to the narrative being played out. Another option is to have someone write their life map and from that draw theological insights from their story.

Proposed Curriculum

Item #1: Syllabus

Moody Bible Institute Syllabus Forming the Spirituality of Emerging Adults

MS 333
Mr. Kirk Baker
Fall 2007
T&R 1:00-2:15pm

Office: Solheim 202
Phone: 4037
kirk.baker@moody.edu

Course Description

This course will provide an overview of the state of emerging adult spirituality. It will consider the various influences affecting the lives of this population. Emphasis will be placed on discovering content and skills to aid emerging adults in their pursuit of a biblical spirituality.

Course Objectives / Outcomes:

Students completing this course should:

1. Have a general understanding of the spirituality held by emerging adults.
2. Begin to understand the forces of influence on the emerging adult soul.
3. Acquire skills to assess and evaluate the state of the emerging adult soul.
4. Develop a theological understanding of personhood and the practical implications of that in relationships.
5. Understand the biblical process of knowing—that is, epistemology.
6. Develop appreciation toward the diversity of God's creation and acquire habits to engage with it.
7. Acquire a deeper understanding of spiritual friendships and become more skilled at being one.

Texts Required:

Arnett, Jeffery Jensen. *Emerging Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Benner, David G. *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002.

Gushee, David P. *Only Human: Christian Reflections on the Journey Toward Wholeness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Mulholland, M. Robert Jr. *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

Palmer, Parker J. *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993.

Volf, Miroslav and Dorthy C. Bass (Ed.). *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

A bibliography of recommended texts is attached.

Class Procedures and Methods

The professor will use lectures, films, class discussion, group work, and class trips to carry out the objectives of this course.

Course Requirements:

Reading Reports	20%
Journal	15%
Spirituality Paper	25%
Project & Presentation	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

Grading

Grade Scale

A	92-100	C+	78-79
A-	90-91	C	72-77
B+	88-89	C-	70-71
B	82-87	D+	68-69
B-	80-81	D	62-67
D-	60-61	F	59 and below

Students are allotted six absences for the semester. Any absences above this number will result in one letter grade reduction and be reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee.

Schedule

Date	Day	Topic	Assignment	Reading
August 21	Tuesday	Introduction		
23	Thursday	Culture		Andy Crouch Culturemakers.org
28	Tuesday	Culture – Definitions & Dynamics		
30	Thursday	EA Culture - Overview		Arnett, pp.3-46.
September 4	Tuesday	EA Attitudes & Attributes		
6	Thursday	EA Attitudes & Attributes		Twenge, pp.17-103
11	Tuesday	Identity Structure & Formulation		
13	Thursday	Social Structure	Reading Report - Arnett	
18	Tuesday	Spiritual Structure		Arnett & Jensen “A Congregation of One”
20	Thursday	Affective Positioning		
25	Tuesday	Theological Positioning		Smith, pp.17-30
27	Thursday	Epistemological Positioning	Reading Report - Mulholland	
October 2	Tuesday	Class Trip		Nouwen, pp.55-60
4	Thursday	Class Trip Debrief		
9	Tuesday	<i>Missions Conference – No Class</i>		
11	Thursday	<i>Missions Conference – No Class</i>	Reading Report - Gushee	
16	Tuesday	<i>Study Reading Day – No Class</i>		
18	Thursday	Theological Re-Positioning	Spirituality Paper Due	Kinlaw, pp.
23	Tuesday	Relational Re-Positioning		Gushee, pp.57-82
25	Thursday	Epistemological Re-Positioning	Reading Report - Palmer	Palmer, pp.
30	Tuesday	Affective Re-Positioning		Houston, pp.89-116.
November 1	Thursday	Liminal Living		
6	Tuesday	Encountering Otherness		Conde-Frazier et al.,pp.105-166.
8	Thursday	Practicing Pilgrimage		
13	Tuesday	Expanding the Portals		Parks, pp.127-157.
15	Thursday	Assessment – Values Clarification	Journal Due	
20	Tuesday	Assessment – Voices of Influence		
22	Thursday	Growth – The New Commons		
27	Tuesday	Growth – Spiritual Friendships	Reading Report - Benner	Benner – Sacred Companions
29	Thursday	Growth – Questions of Dissonance		
December 4	Tuesday	Pruning - Dialogue		
6	Thursday	Pruning - Confrontation	Reading Report - Volf	

Item #2 - Sample Lesson Plans

Unit 1- The Context of Emerging Adult Spiritual Formation

Lesson 1: Culture - What is it? What does it do?

Definitions & Dynamics

Culture...

- A master plan for living.
- An invisible blue print or map of reality.
- Common ways of interpretation. (similar hermeneutic)
- "...is what human beings make of the world in both senses." – Ken

Meyers

- Is based on a provisional understanding of the world. ("make sense of the world")
- Is based on a vision of how the world ought to be. ("making something of the world")
- Creates horizons of possibility. (easier) – Andy Crouch
- Creates horizons of impossibility. (difficult)
- Creates opportunities for more culture – both expected and unexpected.
- Is a cumulative process or activity.
- Has a life of its own. Effects are not anticipated.
- Defined => beliefs, values, customs and traditions that are inherited and passed on, which bind a society together.
- A set of values, recognized consciously or unconsciously.

- The “soup” they swim in everyday.
- Art, music, film, philosophy, books, language, T.V., ideas, values, beliefs, social organization, habits, rules, rites, magazines.

Culture as a set of texts

- Is communicated through texts. (ie. Human actions, events, and material works that embody meanings that are widely shared.)
- Is an “ensemble” of texts.
- Texts can be “read” – interpreted, to understand its meaning or cultural values it represents.
- “Cultural values find social and material existence in our actions and products.” (Romanowski, p.57)

Culture reveals...

- What humans believe about “things” – marriage, family, education, art, politics, sports, etc.
- The close relationship between faith & culture.
- Convictions.

What we find in culture

- Attitudes, emotions, sounds, symbols, language, images, etc.

Culture is...

- Always Directive

“...a collection of ideals and beliefs, values and assumptions, that make up a kind of master plan.”

- Always Reflective

“cultures express the highest values of the dominant worldview.” –

Middleton & Walsh

- Never Neutral

“every square inch, split second, is claimed by God and counter claimed by Satan.” – C.S. Lewis

View the issues/problems in society as CRIES – need to understand the causes of those cries. (moral relativism, amorality, the crisis of character)

What’s the bait on the hook? What’s the lie?

Ways we try to change culture: (that don’t work)

- Once we understand culture, the job is done. (academic)
- Consume culture. (doesn’t really make a difference)
- Not changed by private culture, because culture is not private. (ex.

Christian music industry–disproportionate impact)

Goal

- Gospel becomes available, attractive, plausible to the culture.
- Moves possibility & impossibility toward the gospel.
- Only way we can change culture is to make more of it. (Ex. Mother

Theresa, Habitat For Humanity, U2.)

The iceberg principle

97% practices, objects, artifacts, etc.

3% Ideas

“Do we think ourselves into new ways of behaving or do we behave ourselves into new ways of thinking?”

“The work of the church is to undo what the marketing culture/advanced consumer capitalism has done.”

Identity Formation & Consumer Culture

- Why does brand create?
- Brand loyalty
- Environment of surplus
- Being a consumer is hard work
- Being a producer is glorious
- Generational awareness
- Rise of brand economy
- Consumer marketing
- Brand => identity associated with a commodity.
- Profitable personality (producer)
- Short cut to trust (consumer) – ease of choice, get what you’re desiring.

Goal

- Tell a transcendent story (delightful & inspiring) and sell you that story.

(lifestyle)

- “mobilizing transcendent stories”
- Segmentation
- Targets the needs of a specific population.
- FPLM – “For People Like Me”
- Brand marketers – discover the brand defining differences.
- (more segments = more profits)

- Ideal profitable segment = the individual
- Lie => you are ontologically separated from everyone else.

Generational Consciousness

- Social & marketing construct (MTV built a business on this concept)
- Division into smaller segmentation
- Church needs to combat this lie => reconciliation to overcome differences.

Lesson 2: Emerging Adult Culture – Attitudes & Attributes

Hook: Where have we experienced resistance in sharing and attempting to implement ideas with those who are of a different stage of life? Examples?

Group Activity #1:

- What attitudes or attributes comprise emerging adult life and culture?

Content: Common attributes and attitudes held by emerging adults.

- Entitlement
- Anything is possible
- Individualistic
- Consumeristic
- Socially defined self
- Anti-institutionalism
- Desensitized
- Overly optimistic view of the future
- Attempt to delay responsibility until a later date
- Image driven
- Image maintenance

- Fluid center / unfettered self
- Tribal
- Instantaneous

Group Activity #2: What scenarios can you think of that reveal these attributes of emerging adult culture?

Film clip: “American Idol”

“We lack identity. Because we are not called by God and we do not know ourselves as God knows us, our own identity mocks us in uncertainty. This leads to unstable relationships and actions.”¹⁶⁸

“the double-minded man is unstable in all he does.” - NT

Lesson 3: Emerging Adult Culture – Social Structure

How do EAs relate socially differently than other life stages? (ie. Baby Boomers, G.I. Generation, etc.)

What factors create this different way of relating?

- Technology
- Globalization
- Authenticity trumps respect

The emerging adult phenomenon and the intensity with which it imposes its values on this population is dependent on the socio-cultural context individuals find themselves within. Arnett concludes the cultural context of emerging adults:

¹⁶⁸ James Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996).

- Has occurred only recently and only in some cultures.
- “...Exists today mainly in the industrialized or “postindustrial” countries of the West, along with Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea.”
- EA is a characteristic of cultures rather than countries.
- The length of EA may vary among the cultures within a country. (Ex. Mormons have a shortened and highly structured EA.)
- Variations in socioeconomic status and life circumstances also determine the extent to which a given young person may experience EA. (Ex. Young woman having a child at 16 dictates a lot of her EA)
- Social class may be more important than ethnicity, with young people in the middle class or above having more opportunities for the explorations of EA.
- Currently in economically developing countries, there tends to be a distinct cultural split between urban and rural areas. Young people in urban areas of countries such as China and India are more likely to experience EA. (Somewhat true in the US as well.)
- EA is becoming more pervasive worldwide because of globalization and the world economy. This will grow as more developing counties make secondary school a normative experience. Direct correlation.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 21-23.

Lesson 4: Emerging Adult Culture – Spirituality

Read: Arnett, Jeffery Jensen and Lene Arnett Jensen. “A *Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults.*” *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol.17 No.5, September 2002, 451-467.

EA Religious Beliefs & Attitudes

- For the most part, form their beliefs apart from parental or institutional influence.
- Form unique combinations from various religious traditions as well as other sources such as pop culture, schools, and friends.
- These traditions are only one source among many from which young people construct their religious beliefs.
- The strength of family socialization wanes while the influence of socialization sources outside the family increases.
- Their departure from religious participation is temporary, to be resumed once they enter adult roles of marriage and parenthood. However, they maintain the individualism characterizing their beliefs.
- It is not as if they are uninterested in religious issues – they give them great thought.
- “...they have concluded that... their beliefs are best observed not through regular participation in a religious institution with other, like-minded believers,

but by themselves, in the privacy of their own hearts and minds, in a congregation of one.”¹⁷⁰

Lesson 5: Emerging Adult – Affective Positioning

Video clip – “Tuesdays with Morrie”

Two attributes to investigate:

- Individualism
- Consumerism

In-Class Assignment: (group discussion)

- In what ways have these two attributes found their way inside the church and the soul of Christians?
- Share specific instances where these attributes show up in our spirituality.
- How have our beliefs and behavior been shaped by these?
- How are our churches being shaped by these attributes?

Lesson 6: Emerging Adult – Personal Positioning

(Identity Formulation)

Video clip – Film “About a boy”; clip “no man is an island”

Discussion Questions:

- What ties identity together?
- What is the distinction between faith and identity?

Stan Grenz on the socially defined self.

¹⁷⁰ Jeffery Jensen Arnett and Lene Arnett Jensen, 451-467.

*The just modern condition entails the loss of the disengaged isolated observer who as a self-existent autonomous individual forms that primary building block for the purely contractual social order. Rather the postmodern self is constituted by social relationships. The socially formed self, however, is highly decentered and fluid, for a person can have as many selves as social groups in which he or she participates. Consequently, the self is a bundle of fluctuating relationships and momentary preferences. In a fast-changing world however, this leads to a highly unstable, impermanent self.*¹⁷¹

Identity

*“...refers to a particular way in which self may be arranged, constructed and eventually told, identity is the story of the self, as narrated and interpreted by the self.”*¹⁷²

Faith

- Content which defines and positions identity.
- Acts as an informant – who we are, who made us, where we are, what we need, what we’re about.
- Provides the shape and substance of our identities.

Illustration

- Faith & identity contextualized.
- Share moments of crisis and the role of faith/belief in such moments.

Examples

- 9/11
- Bonhoeffer

¹⁷¹ Grenz, 130.

¹⁷² Kenneth E. Bussema, “Who am I? Whose am I?: Identity and Faith in the College Years,” *Research on Christian Higher Education* 6 (1999): 1-33.

- The mall

Lesson 7: Emerging Adult – Theological Positioning

Read: Bussema, Kenneth E. “*Who am I? Whose am I?: Identity and Faith in the College Years.*” *Research on Christian Higher Education* 6 (1999) 1-33.

- Why does theology matter?
- What purpose does it serve?
- The importance of theology in the practice of our spirituality.
- The importance of theology in the practice of our ministry.
- Describe the EA theology.

“Moral therapeutic deism” is the term Smith and Denton use to illustrate the religious beliefs of emerging adults. This term is defined by the following characteristics:

- A God who exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
- God wants people to be nice, good, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 162-63.

The substance of our confession

David Wells provides a fine analysis of present state of theology. “Once (confession) has lost its discipline in the Word of God, it finds its subject matter anywhere along a line that runs from Eastern Spirituality to radical politics to feminist ideology to environmental concerns.” He continues, “The Christian Faith has become privatized and at a single stroke confession is eviscerated and reflection reduced mainly to thought about one’s self.”¹⁷⁴

Example: Sin losing its meaning in the current culture.

Lesson 8: Emerging Adult – Epistemological Positioning

Read: Palmer, Parker J. *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993.

Henri Nouwen. *In the Name of Jesus*. New York: Crossroad, 1998, pp.55-60.

Media Clip:

- Ways people acquire knowledge.
- Share various media pieces displaying the distorted manner people acquire knowledge.
- Adam and Eve – our first example, but not our last.

The results of a distorted epistemology

- Devalued personhood

¹⁷⁴ David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 101.

- Distrust & increased skepticism
- Becomes the standard mode of knowing

Lesson 9: Emerging Adult – Theological Re-Positioning

The creator, model, and sustainer of our personhood: The Holy Trinity

- Their nature individually
- Their nature corporately
- Perichoresis
- John 17
- John 14:11-14
- Matt. 6:9-15 (worldview statement/positioning prayer)

Context

- Grace
- Romans 5 and 6
- John 1:17
- Ephesians 2:5-8

The Cross

- 1Cor.2:2; Gal.2:20
- Matt.10:38; Lk.9:23

Share quotes from L.E. Maxwell's Born Crucified, pp.55-60.

Lesson 10: High Road vs. Low Road Knowing

Provide overview of structure: (sketch them out)

- Liminal living
- Encountering other

- Practicing pilgrimage
- Expanding the portals

A well-developed theology needs to support any methodology we acquire.

Every conversation has two stories going on based on two different ways of knowing. (different language codes)

Connections fostered between the high road and low road of knowing

What is the high road? (cortex)

- Linear
- Logical
- Language based
- Left brain
- Explicit
- Academic
- Theological/Biblical content
- Cognitive
- Conscious

What is the low road? (limbic system)

- Non-linear
- Holistic
- Non-verbal
- Implicit
- Memory driven
- Gut-level knowing

- Emotive

Thesis: effective discipleship integrates these two levels of knowing. (Procedural knowing vs. experiential knowing)

The place and role of emotions:

- May be a good place begin the path of transformation
- It is the place that evaluates and determines the events in our lives.
- Starting point for engaging our hearts with God and others because they reveal our deepest values.
- Not the only place to camp, but important to investigate.

The low road of knowing drives how we relate.

- Processed automatically.
- Not under the direct control of knowing explicitly.
- Examples:
- Speed dating – six minutes.
- Gut level knowledge of God is influenced by implicit memories with significant caregivers.
- We tag experiences that make up our history. (authority figure)
- Traumatic events.

Does transformation occur through specific stages (James Fowler) or in specific moments (James E. Loder)?

- Transformation does not occur in a orderly, predictable proportional manner.
- Tipping Points – Malcom Gladwell

Relationships (with God and others) provide the structure for an individual to be transformed.

- Help promote a haven and secure base from which to process life. (F.

LeRon Shults - diagram)

- Detox and reframing of suffering. (new meaning and understanding)

Structured Spontaneity as a method of discipleship

Examples:

- Comedy improv – guided by a series of rules.
- Team sports – set plays on offense
- Counseling/therapy – clinical expertise

Breakthroughs come to those who have furnished their:

- Minds
- Souls
- Relational connections

How do we integrate the two levels of knowing (high road & low road)?

Meeting people on the low road: What are they passionate about?

- The arts
- Sports
- Old cars
- Missions
- Archeology
- New technology

What situations are they currently consuming them?

- Death of a loved one
- Job prospects
- Relational break up
- Moving to a new area
- Roommate troubles
- Dislike PCM
- Failing a course

Questions of cognitive dissonance

- Those questions which do not have easy answers
- Examples: HIV/AIDS, human trafficking,

What was the purpose behind having you do the life map?

- Connecting and translating our experiences into words through narratives and journaling.

Why do we like watching movies? Why do we participate in the arts? Why do we watch March madness & fill out our brackets?

- We observe values and worldviews playing themselves out. These realms become arenas from which to begin the dialogue of more significant questions and content.

Why do we like courses such as “Christ and the Novel” and “Theology of Suffering?”

- They help foster and promote the integration needing to take place.

True discipleship for you and I:

- Move in
- Observe our family interactions
- What are our habits & practices (Are they virtuous? To what extent?)
- How are we dealing with the messiness of life? Are you able to see it?
- Serve and do ministry along side each other.

Item #3 – Required Reading

The following items are the reading for the course as organized by section. They will be placed on reserve in the library or if they are journal articles they will be put on Blackboard.

The Context of Spiritual Formation

Arnett, Jeffery Jensen and Lene Arnett Jensen. “A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults.” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 17, no.5 (September 2002): 451-467.

Arnett, Jeffery Jensen. *Emerging Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 3-46; 207-228.

Christian Smith. “Theorizing Religious Effects Among American Adolescents.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, no.1 (2003): 17-30.

Twenge, Jean M. *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. New York: Free Press, 2006, 17-103.

The Content of Spiritual Formation

Gushee, David P. *Only Human: Christian Reflections on the Journey Toward Wholeness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005, 57-82.

Bussema, Kenneth E. “Who am I? Whose am I?: Identity and Faith in the College Years.” *Research on Christian Higher Education* 6 (1999): 1-33.

Birkholz, Mark. “Walking with God: Students’ Stories of Spiritual Growth at a Small Christian College.” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* Spring 6, no.1 (1997): 21-47.

Mulholland, M. Robert Jr. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. Rev.ed. Nashville: Upper Room, 2000.

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Palmer, Parker J. *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993.

Volf, Miroslav and Dorthy C. Bass., ed. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

The Method of Spiritual Formation

Beers, Stephen. "Faith Development on Christian College Campuses: A Student Affairs Mandate." *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Students Development* no.3, (Spring 2003): 23-35.

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Hindman, David M. "From Splintered Lives to Whole Persons: Facilitating Spiritual Development in College Students." *Religious Education* 97, no.2 (Spring 2002): 165-181.

Holm, Neil. "Formation of Resident Aliens: Anabaptist Conversations, Christly Gestures, and Celtic Pilgrimages" *Journal of Christian Education* 46, no.2 (September 2003).

Lamb, Richard. *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001.

Lawson, Kevin, and Richard Leyda. 'Exploring a "Coaching" Model for Promoting Spiritual Formation.' *Christian Education Journal* 4NS (2000): 63-83.

Parks, Sharon Daloz. *Big Questions, Worthy dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Item #4 – Outcomes Assessment

An important part in determining the effectiveness of this material and course is the evaluation and assessment of it as it becomes implemented. Without doing this there is no evidence of learning taking place in lives of those being taught. Thus, this vital link in the teaching process must be instituted if those teaching (and learning) desire to get the best return on the investment they are making. The following are several aspects which need consideration in the assessment process.

When will assessment be conducted?

- At the end of each semester.
- Yearly
- Ongoing

What will be assessed?

- Knowledge objectives
- Attitude / Affective objectives
- Skill acquisition objectives

How will it be assessed?

- Knowledge – Multiple choice

- Affective – observation, short answer questionnaire
- Skill – Checklist or rating scale

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS

What I Would Do Differently

Looking back over the journey of this project there numerous things the researcher would do differently. Some of these items are due to the inability and lack of skill held by the researcher while others are due to time constraints or not thinking about an item before now.

One concern the researcher has is the lack of statistical data to inform conclusions made throughout the project. Most of the conclusions, if not all of them, have been dependent upon other sources or authors. The researcher acknowledges this as a weakness and believes a stronger case for the project could have been developed with such data and its analysis.

Another thing the researcher would do differently is to meet with a colleague to process and evaluate the content being written. This would aid in the flow, logic, and conclusions formulated by the researcher. Accountability is always a positive regardless of the context.

Limitations

The potential for emerging adults to be transformed through this process (curriculum, courses, relationship, experience) or any process is their ability open themselves up to investigation and their willingness to respond responsibly. Brokenness seems to be key attribute present in the lives of those individuals who experience deep and significant transformation. There is a percentage of each new class who may encounter the ideas, content, relationships, experiences in this

curriculum and push back rejecting it. This may be a great way for the author to reevaluate and reassess the material presented. Or possibly, it may be a case of the student not being in a position or place in their life to encounter such material. The intent will be that room and freedom will be created for those whom this is the case.

Another major limitation is the reality that most of the material discussed in this project pertains only to Westernized Caucasian populations. This is due to the sources used by the author, the definition and characteristics of an emerging adult, and the specific applied focus population of Moody Bible Institute. Some conclusions may be true on various levels for other demographics, but it is impossible to draw accurate conclusions in this respect.

Implications

This study reveals several implications for those in working with emerging adults, specifically, those in Christian higher education and those working with young adults and college students in the church setting. (College pastors, singles pastors, young adult pastors, etc.)

The Practice of Listening

First, the place to begin for those working with emerging adults is to listen. Listen by observing their behavior, decisions, and relationships. Listen to the stories they are telling you. Hear the ones spoken verbally and also the ones that exist beneath the surface of those words. Listen to the themes that arise—ones of pain, trauma, abuse, as well as ones of celebration, excitement, and passion.

This time of listening often lays the groundwork for what happens next in the relationships we find ourselves in.

Assessment of Formational Structures Already in Place

Second, there is a great need for those involved in ministering to emerging adults to assess the structures and programs in place which are serving them. These structures may include; chapel, worship service, small groups, service opportunities, teaching format, topic content discussed or taught, etc. Which structures are effective? How do we define effective? Are the structures serving our objectives and goals? A word of caution must be communicated here. As much as the emerging adult voice and opinion must be listened to, it should not be the final determining factor in deciding which way to go. Too many ministries, organizations and schools make decisions by holding up a moist finger to discover which way the wind is blowing. To align oneself with popular opinion is easy and tempting. However, this act is dangerous and is often dishonoring to God.

The Way We Position Ourselves in Relation to Emerging Adults

Third, how are we placing ourselves in the lives of emerging adults? Is it enough, balanced, strategic, authentic, available, and discerning? Intentionality must be used when we engage in the lives of those to whom we are ministering. Too many individuals become burned out and lose much of their love and concern for emerging adults. Also, how discerning are we as we engage in the lives of emerging adults? Do we know when to refer someone to a counselor or another person who can help in a superior way? Are we good at defining boundaries

when specific relationships encroach past the point of what is defined as being healthy?

Work Hard in Developing Content and Methodology

Fourth, those who teach emerging adults, either formally or informally, must work hard in developing their content and method. The evidence from this study reveals the great need to instruct emerging adults in theology and help them understand how it relates to all of life. I believe emerging adults can and do have a huge appetite for theology. This appetite grows as they come to see what purpose that theology serves (“a way of life” as per Miroslav Volf.) Just as important, today more than ever, is the method one uses to teach. Emerging adults have been conditioned to attune themselves to the new, the shiny, and whatever tickles their senses most. Thus, teachers need to strive hard to develop a teaching environment that reaches their soul level.

Network with Those Ministering to Emerging Adults

Fifth, there is a need to network with and learn from those who are ministering to emerging adults on a regular basis. Those who serve on the front lines involved in these peoples lives have much to share and will help put flesh on that which research is revealing. This is a vital link in helping those involved with emerging adults move them toward maturity in Christ. Steps must be taken to coordinate such structures that promotes and allows this crucial communication and sharing of ideas.

Model What You Teach

Finally, the last implication must be for those who are serving the emerging adult population it becomes necessary for them to engage in this process themselves. We cannot take individuals or groups beyond where we have gone ourselves. Without knowing the journey how can one help others navigate? Those habits and practices displayed in our own life will foster credibility and pose a question in the lives that encounter it.

Further Study

This study, similar to most studies, creates more questions than it answers. Some of those questions which arose throughout the project are as follows.

Assessment of Spiritual Formation

First, is it possible to assess an individual's spiritual formation? The nature of spiritual formation poses the problem. Because we are dealing with the spiritual and things that are transcendent, it becomes very difficult to quantitatively evaluate the process. How can we measure an individual's relationship with God?

Two key groups are currently involved in such an endeavor. One group is Bill Fisher, Dean of Christian Faith & Life and Campus Pastor at Huntington University and Keith Anderson, Senior Fellow of Spiritual Formation for the CCCU and Dean of Spiritual Formation and Vocation at Northwestern College (Iowa) are leading a spiritual formation assessment process for Christian college campuses in the CCCU. (Council of Christian Colleges and Universities) Their assessment process involves spending time on the campus in focus and evaluating

many of the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities students participate in.

The second group is lead by Todd Hall, professor at Biola University and president of Concentus Assessment solutions, who has developed a spiritual formation assessment tool. Hall has developed a Spiritual Transformation Inventory and conducted extensive research on the spiritual formation of CCCU students. It is my intention to interact with these individuals to discuss the process of forming the spirituality of emerging adults.

Historical Figures

A strategic way to enhance the spiritual formation is to study the lives of those who did it well throughout history. Such figures as Augustine, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, Brother Lawrence, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainard, and A.W. Tozer prove to be great examples in discovering the form and content of spiritual formation. Engagement with individuals like these helps promote the development of a spirituality that transcends the present and considers all that church history has given us.

Development of a Ministry Leaders Network

A desire that has been stirred during this project is the urgency to contact and network with pastors and ministry leaders who work with emerging adults. I am not aware of a functional structure that connects the people and resources in this area. Much consideration, prayer, and thought will focus on the possibility of creating a network to serve those working with this population. The intention

would be to contact, survey, interview, and strategize with leaders working with this group.

Compiling More “Encountering Other” Experiences

An ongoing effort is the compiling of “encountering other” experiences. I am constantly on the lookout for lab like experiences for my students and my self to grow. Some of the experiences available are; serving new refugees from various countries, working with L’arche Daybreak, serving in the multitude of homeless centers in Chicago, spending time with an ethnic family different than you and learning their culture, going on a short term missions trip, etc. A key resource in developing and discovering more of these opportunities is working with the missions department at Moody Bible Institute.

The Role of Suffering and Pain in Spiritual Formation

A potential area for further investigation is the role of pain and suffering and how it relates to an individuals spiritual formation. How does God use these types of experience to draw us to himself? Is there a maturity level reached where this perspective is held? This appears to be a profound catalyst propelling an individual toward growth and maturity.

Further Study in Faith Development

Greater research in the area of faith development is needed. Such figures as James Fowler (stages of faith) and James Loder (transformational moments) are crucial to anyone’s study in the area of spiritual formation. Studying each of these models and their implications to a practicing faith would prove to be profitable.

Next Steps

Many ideas, aspirations, dreams, and goals flow from a project like this. There exists a mountain of possibilities and numerous roads to venture down. The following is a summary of possible agenda items the author may pursue in the future.

First, it would be advantageous to formulate and implement a survey that accurately assesses the process of spiritual formation taking place in the lives of young adults. This could be done from a quantitative standpoint. Qualitatively, research and data could be gathered by conducting focus groups (small groups of 6-8 students) asking them strategic questions and recording their feedback. The goal will be to accrue data that can continually grow understanding and ultimately the practice of spiritual formation with young adults. This point would be carried out in partnership with the institutional researcher.

Second, it would be beneficial to foster and initiate discussion with key administrative figures to take steps toward modifying the structure and systems affecting spiritual formation in place at Moody Bible Institute. This may include attempting to acquire grants, resources such as new facilities, personnel, programs, and more.

Third, to promote spiritual formation at Moody Bible Institute, faculty could create a faculty forum in which to present, listen, and dialogue between faculty and students regarding their experience with students in and out of the classroom. This time together will centre on the topic of spiritual formation – what it is and how it is best done? An expectation would be that each discipline,

potentially each faculty member, would reveal the diversity and various approaches used in the spiritual formation of emerging adults.

Fourth, develop cross department and discipline relationships to promote spiritual formation initiatives. (Student Development, Counseling services, Chapel program, Practical Christian Ministry, Internships, Study Abroad, Missions trips)

Fifth, network with other undergraduate institutions (CCCU and ABHE) as to what are the best practices for spiritual formation of college students. Many schools have elaborate and full orbbed spiritual formation programs, while others do not see it as something to funnel resources toward.

Sixth, consider alternative methods and environments for teaching courses in the area of spiritual formation such as in a camp setting, urban, Rocky Mountains, service oriented, or developing country. This could offer the double benefit of potentially drawing faculty from different departments and disciplines to teach together.

Seventh, explore opportunities to have graduate students at Moody Bible Institute mentor and disciple undergraduates. This opportunity is a natural fit and provides a benefit to both groups.

Lastly, develop a yearly retreat for undergraduate students and professors that focus on spiritual formation. This could be a time and place for reflection, worship, prayer, fellowship, solitude, and just providing space for God in peoples lives.

APPENDIX

TERMINOLOGY

Every subject area has terms that help shape the conceptual landscape. They provide anchor holds to the foundational content allowing one to tether while exploring possibilities and pushing the boundaries of a specific field of study. The following terms and definitions have become the support beams from which to build a workshop of ideas. The terms correspond to the literature review of spiritual formation covered in part two of chapter three.

Spiritual Formation:

“The process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others”¹⁷⁵

“The process of being set apart with the intent to be made holy”¹⁷⁶

“...The being of our inner character and outer conduct, in cooperation with the work of the Spirit, so that we are gradually being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ”¹⁷⁷

Formation:

“...The impact of...leaning on a life so that the matrix of perspective, behavior, values, and personhood are changed, reshaped with new contours and intentions.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 12.

¹⁷⁶ Christy Morr, “The Role of Friendship in Spiritual Formation,” *Christian Education Journal* 4NS (2000): 50.

¹⁷⁷ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 38.

This realignment, restructuring, and reformation of a dynamic being comes with internalization and integration”¹⁷⁸

Christian Spirituality:

“Christian spirituality involves a deepening trust and friendship with God for those who are in Christ Jesus...it is an ever growing, experientially dynamic relationship with our trinitarian God- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- through the agency of the indwelling Spirit of God”¹⁷⁹

Spiritual Life:

“...Consists in that range of activities on which people cooperatively interact with God- and with the spiritual order deriving from God’s personality and action... the result? A new overall quality of human existence with corresponding new powers”¹⁸⁰

Spiritual Disciplines:

“...Concrete activities designed to render bodily beings such as we ever more sensitive and receptive to the Kingdom of Heaven brought to us in Christ, even while living in a world against God”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Gangel and Wilhoit, 235.

¹⁷⁹ Issler, 25-26.

¹⁸⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 67.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 252.

“...The act of releasing ourselves in a consistent manner to God, opening those doors in a regular way to allow God’s transforming work in our lives”¹⁸²

Spiritual Direction:

“...is one Christian accompanying another as he or she seeks to increase attentiveness to the presence and direction of the Spirit of God”¹⁸³

“...Is a prayer process in which a person seeking help in cultivating a deeper personal relationship with God meets with another for prayer and conversation that is focused on increasing awareness of God in the midst of life experiences and facilitating surrender to God’s will”¹⁸⁴

“...(Is) the ministry of soul care in which a gifted and experienced Christian help another person to grow in relationship with and obedience to God by following the example of Jesus Christ”¹⁸⁵

Spiritual Friendship:

“...Involves two or more Christians on a relatively equal basis, who support, encourage, and pray for one another”¹⁸⁶

“...Someone who will stay at our side through the everyday ups and downs of life, helping us to maintain our faith focus”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Mulholland, 38.

¹⁸³ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 90.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 94.

¹⁸⁵ Demarest, *Soul Guide*, 13.

¹⁸⁶ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 191.

“...(A way of knowing) each other not by the outer part of persona but by the dependable and relatively stable elements of habit, character, disposition and trait”¹⁸⁸

(purpose) “...is the means by which God reveals his goodness by helping us know others and ourselves and thereby know”¹⁸⁹

Soul Care:

“...Searches out hindrances to prayer, obstacles to intimacy with Christ, and responsiveness to the Spirit’s leading...(it) deals with the foundational issues of the heart, recognizing that dysfunction at the core negatively affect everything the disciple does”¹⁹⁰

Sanctification:

“... Is an on going cooperative work between God and the Individual...a divine operation initiated by God”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Demarest, *Soul Guide*, 13.

¹⁸⁸ Benner, 68.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁹⁰ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 196-197.

¹⁹¹ Morr, 50.

Spiritual Mentoring:

“... A more formal arrangement in which a mature Christian offers another believer regular instruction, training, and modeling in spiritual formation and ministry”¹⁹²

Spiritual Guidance:

“Talking with a friend about Christian lifestyle issues; recommending a good book on the spiritual life; counseling another person while enjoying a walk in nature- these are examples of spiritual guidance”¹⁹³

¹⁹² Demarest, *Satisfy your Soul*, 192.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 191.

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